



4 Sri Lanka gradually opening up to international tourism



16 Man City on brink of title glory



VOLVO

No pandemic end in sight; cases surge in India, Brazil

3.2 million lives lost globally, infections soar past 150 million



BALTIMORE, Maryland: US Vice President Kamala Harris with Dr Jason Marx (second right), Vice President of the University of Maryland Medical System; US Senator Chris Van Hollen (left), and Dr Anthony Fauci. One hundred million people in the US are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Fresh coronavirus waves showed no sign of abating yesterday as devastating surges in India and Brazil pushed daily infections and deaths to record levels. Despite the rollout of vaccines in many countries, COVID-19 is still wreaking destruction around the world, with close to 3.2 million lives lost and known infections soaring past 150 million.

Asia has recorded the bulk of new cases, driven largely by the surge in India. The crushing outbreak, which now accounts for more than 40 percent of the world's new infections, has overwhelmed the South Asian nation's healthcare system and depleted critical oxygen supplies. Authorities yesterday opened India's massive vaccination program to all adults, but many states do not have enough doses to

meet demand despite a freeze on exports of shots produced locally.

"There are so many people that are getting sick... we just wanted to be here as soon as possible," said Aadya Mehta, 25, who joined a queue of around 100 people outside a hospital in the capital New Delhi. India reported more than 400,000 cases in 24 hours yesterday, a global record.

India should go into lockdown for several weeks to arrest the current devastating surge in COVID cases, top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said in comments published yesterday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has resisted imposing a national lockdown after a nationwide shutdown a year ago caused widespread human suffering and a painful economic hit.

Meanwhile, at least 16 COVID-19 patients and two nurses died yesterday in the latest in a series of hospital fires in India, officials said.

There were around 50 other patients at the four-storey hospital in Bharuch in the western state of Gujarat when the blaze began at 1 am (0730 GMT). It has since been put out. The death toll stood at 18, local police official Rajendrasinh Chudasama told AFP, "including 16 patients and two nurses."

More than 40 countries have committed to sending medical aid. A US military aircraft carrying more than 400 oxygen cylinders, other hospital equipment and nearly one million rapid coronavirus tests arrived in New Delhi on Friday.

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Local

Prime Minister, FM discuss ties, issues with Iranian FM

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his accompanying delegation on Thursday at Seif Palace. During the meeting, the two sides discussed regional and international issues of common concern, and views on promoting bilateral relationships between the two friendly countries.

The meeting also included Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Ali Suleiman Al-Said.

Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad later held a separate meeting with his counterpart Zarif and his accompanying delegation. In a statement by the foreign ministry, the two discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance them, in addition to regional and international developments and how to achieve security and stability in the region, including peace, progress and prosperity.—KUNA



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (left) and Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (right) receive visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Thursday. — KUNA



ICSK Junior holds virtual kindergarten graduation ceremony

KUWAIT: ICSK Junior conducted the first virtual graduation ceremony of kindergarten on Monday, March 22, 2021. After the welcome note by Abida, the academic supervisor Shafika Yunus, addressed the gathering. A beautiful skit by the students gave us a glimpse of the academic year and a marvelous dance



performance by our charms of UKG made the event livelier.

Principal Sherly Dennis and Vice Principal Sheeja Ravi addressed the gathering and their speech inspired the students. They also congratulated the tiny graduates. Mahajabeen, thanked all the members present during the event. The students then joined their respective classes for their class-wise ceremony. Class teachers felicitated each graduate with a sense of pride and after the felicitation, the little graduates enjoyed a small party filled with games, dance and crunchy snacks.

The individual class ceremony ended with a pledge followed by the Indian national anthem and a thanking note by the class teachers.

Ooredoo supports humanitarian campaigns with Al-Najat Society

KUWAIT: Based on a study conducted by the United Nations (UN), three in 10 people lack access to safely managed drinking water services. While having access to clean drinking water is a basic life right for all humans. With this in mind, and driven by the company's social responsibility program, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has donated KD 5,000 to Al-Najat Charity Society, for its drilling wells campaign.

The campaign was launched by Al-Najat Charity Society on Monday, March 22nd, 2021, which coincided with the World Water Day. The aim is to provide clean drinking water for the poor countries including: Niger, Bangladesh, Mauritania, India, Chad, and others; and defeating diseases resulting from clean water scarcity that leads to losing hundreds of lives every day. The campaign aims to dig 500 artesian wells, with a total cost of KD 250,000.

More and above, in its role of spreading awareness towards this humanitarian campaign, Ooredoo Kuwait sent thousands of text messages to its customers,



النجاة الخيرية
ALNAJAT CHARITY



encouraging them to donate to and to help the low-income countries and communities; as it is our collective duty.

From her side, Fatima Dashti, Senior Manager, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Taking Kuwait as a role model in humanitarian work, we at Ooredoo Kuwait are continuing our path in philanthropic initiatives with the aim of achieving sustainable development goals that promote prosperity while protecting the earth.

"Our participation in such initiatives stems from our humanitarian, moral and societal duty, which makes it imperative for us to continue promoting and participating in various humanitarian initiatives inside and outside the country. It is our collective responsibility to work towards finding shared vision and solutions that benefit all humans" Dashti added.



Fatima Dashti



KUWAIT: Firefighters battle a blaze at a tire dump in Salmi on Thursday.



Five fire centers battle Salmi tire dump blaze

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force said five fire centers contained a blaze at a tire dump in Salmi. Shaqaya, vocational Jahra, Kazma, backup and Sulaibkhat fire centers isolated the burning tires despite several obstacles including strong winds and a lack of hydrants. Moreover, there are no roads to allow fire-fighting equipment to reach the blaze, which was in the

middle of millions of tires. No injuries were reported.

Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah followed the firefighting operations, while Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad and his deputy Maj Gen Jamal Al-Bulaihees were on hand.

Meanwhile, the Fire Force said Muhallab sea fire and rescue responded to a call about a boat marooned near Qaruh Island with 14 members of a family on board. The family members - who were all in good health - were taken aboard a fire center boat, while the 36-foot boat was tugged safely back to the marina.

In another incident, Farwaniya and Ardhiya firemen put out a fire in an Omariya house. The fire was on the first floor. No injuries were reported.



No pandemic end in sight, cases

Continued from Page 1

But the crisis has also prompted travel warnings and flight bans with governments fearful of the outbreak spreading to their shores.

Another vast nation struggling to inoculate as many people as possible in the face of a destructive spike is Brazil, which has one of the world's highest mortality rates at 189 deaths per 100,000 people. It reported nearly 2,600 new coronavirus deaths on Friday, bringing the total for April to 82,266 — the second consecutive monthly record and a sharp rise from March. The surge has pushed Brazil's hospitals to the brink of collapse in many areas as the country's overall death toll crossed 400,000 this week.

Demonstrators from the human rights

group Rio de Paz lowered Brazilian flags and mock body bags into symbolic graves at Rio de Janeiro's famous Copacabana beach on Friday, protesting the government's handling of the crisis.

"Those body bags represent the Brazilians who had to be buried in shallow graves," said Antonio Carlos Costa, the NGO's president. "They died without the slightest dignity."

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was widely criticized for downplaying the threat of the virus, and for fighting stay-at-home measures. The far-right president has defended his pandemic policies, telling supporters: "I was wrong about nothing." The outbreak in neighboring Argentina also continued to worry the government, which on Friday extended by three weeks a nightly coronavirus curfew for the capital Buenos Aires.

In terms of total COVID-19 deaths, Brazil is behind only the United States, where the situation has taken a turn for the better in recent months with a successful vaccine rollout.

The White House said Friday that 100 million people in the country had been fully vac-

inated, and more than 55 percent of American adults had received at least one dose.

The huge effort has meant coronavirus restrictions in many parts of the United States can be eased. Fans wearing Mickey Mouse ears lined up at Disneyland in California as it finally reopened Friday, more than 400 days after the pandemic forced its closure.

"It is the greatest feeling ever," said Momi Young-Wilkins, a 55-year-old mother as she brought her children to the world-famous park near Los Angeles. Thanks to vaccinations, some European governments have also eased or are considering relaxing coronavirus restrictions, including France and Belgium. But the hugely uneven distribution of vaccines around the world has led to calls for greater access in poor nations and waivers for patent protections to help boost access.

A US trade official said Friday that Washington was working with World Trade Organization members to ensure "equitable" access to vaccines but stopped short of signaling a commitment to waiving patent protections. —AFP

Kissinger warns of dangers in US-China strains

WASHINGTON: Acclaimed diplomat Henry Kissinger said that US-China tensions threaten to engulf the entire world and could lead to an Armageddon-like clash between the two military and technology giants. The 97-year-old former US secretary of state, who as an advisor to president Richard Nixon crafted the 1971 unfreezing of relations between Washington and Beijing, said the mix of economic, military and technological strengths of the two superpowers carried more risks than the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Strains with China are "the biggest problem for America, the biggest problem for the world," Kissinger told the McCain Institute's Sedona Forum on global issues. "Because if we can't solve that, then the risk is that all over the world a kind of cold war will develop between China and the United States."

While nuclear weapons were already large enough to damage the entire globe during the Cold War, he said advances in nuclear technology and artificial intelligence have multiplied the doomsday threat. — AFP

Local

Step-by-step guide to renewing a vehicle's registration in Kuwait

Technical inspection to no longer be free at traffic inspection departments

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Renewing a vehicle's registration in Kuwait involves a number of steps. Third-party insurance is the first step of the renewal process, which can be purchased from any insurance office. It's very important to always have valid insurance to avoid paying a fortune in case of an accident. The insurance fee differs according to the type of the vehicle and how many passengers it can carry.

You then have to take the vehicle for technical inspection to a traffic inspection department, depending on your address. There is one traffic inspection department in each governorate. The inspection used to be done for free, but starting from May 12, 2021, a new fee will be imposed.

According to ministry decree 203/2021 issued recently, vehicle owners will have to pay a KD 2 fee for the technical inspection. This includes personal vehicles, trucks, taxis, buses, agricultural and industrial vehicles, commercial vehicles and ATVs. Motorcycle owners will only pay KD 1.

The decree includes other fees related to the

technical inspection, such as KD 10 for having the inspection done at another location instead of the traffic department, which is usually done for companies that have many vehicles. Also, fees for many other services are included in the decree, including for changing the color of the vehicle, issuance of car plates and various permits, among others.

After passing the technical inspection successfully, you will go to the traffic department to receive the vehicle registration (daftar). Before it is issued, you have to pay any pending fines. This can be done online if the fine is payable online, or at the traffic department. It is also possible to demand a photo of the violation taken by the speed or traffic light cameras.

Some fines for serious traffic violations cannot be paid online. These violations may include withdrawal of the driving license for a certain period, imprisonment or other sanctions. Such fines can only be paid at the traffic department after being signed by the director of the department.

Only then can you receive the new daftar of the vehicle, after paying KD 5 for the renewal. If you go



to a private center for technical inspection, you can have all the work done at one place at the same time. In addition to the fees for each service mentioned above, you will pay an additional KD 10 for the comfort of renewing the car's registration under one roof and saving time and effort.

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait commits support to WEPs

KUWAIT: ABCK-AmCham Kuwait has become one of the signatories for the United Nations' (UN) Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs), supported by its Women in Business Focus Group, chaired by Dr Arezou Harraf. ABCK-AmCham Kuwait joins almost



Frank Belonus

4,800+ global signatory companies, and 30 signatory companies in the state of Kuwait, which are part of supporting and advancing the WEPs. The WEPs are a group of principles developed in 2010, which offer a holistic framework to organizations and businesses on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community. The 7 WEPs principles are an initiative established by the UN Global Compact and UN Women, and these principles encourage companies and their leadership to improve gender equality, as well as other facets to advance gender equality in their workforce, supply chains, and communities.

Frank Belonus, Chairman of the Board of AmCham Kuwait said: "ABCK-AmCham Kuwait is proud to be one of many globally signing the Women Empowerment Principles by the United Nations Global Compact. Last year, ABCK-AmCham Kuwait launched a Women in Business (WIB) Focus Group, as we saw a need for a group that helps and empowers women in the workforce within our own membership and in Kuwait.

"Our WIB Focus Group aligns with Kuwait's Vision 2035, which includes achieving gender equality and empowerment for women, as the role of women in the workforce and economic development is crucial for the economic development and diversification of any country. By signing the Women Empowerment Principles by the United Nations Global Compact, we step in the right direction as an organization, as we express our support in advancing gender equality by using the 7 principles of the WEPs as guiding points in benefit to our society."

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait is proud to commit to work collaboratively with multi-stakeholder networks such as their own Corporate Members to foster business practices that empower women.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways honored the Kuwait Food Bank, one of the establishments that contributed to operations by Kuwait Airways to evacuate citizens from abroad in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Acting Kuwait Airways CEO Capt Essa Al-Haddad honored Deputy Chairman of KFB Mishal Al-Ansari and Media Advisor Waleed Al-Suqobi in the presence of Kuwait Airways Public Relations and Information Director Fayez Al-Enezi.

ABK celebrates Girgian with children of Hope School

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently sponsored Girgian for the children of HOPE School for Special Needs, which was organized at the school on April 27, 2021. HOPE School for Special Needs is a private international school established in 2006 to serve children with intellectual developmental disorders. The school specializes in preschool to elementary age children diagnosed with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities such as autism, Down Syndrome and general learning delays.

Sponsoring Girgian for HOPE School emerges from the Bank's firm belief in the importance of integration of all within Kuwaiti society, and reiterates the Bank's

commitment towards making a difference in the communities in which it operates. This sponsorship is one of a number of ABK's Ramadan activities, aimed at spreading the spirit of the holy month among children and the community.



Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am until the end of Ramadan to help curb an increase in COVID-19 cases. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed to deliver food from 7:00 pm to 3:00 am every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only a maximum of two passengers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit www.moci.shop, enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swabs and COVID-19 vaccinations.

Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

- | | |
|--|--|
| Omariya Co-op
WhatsApp 6041-0067 | Rabiya Co-op
WhatsApp 2438-8316 |
| Farwaniya Co-op
WhatsApp 6767-8211 | Wafra Farm Co-op
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085 |
| Qairawan Co-op
WhatsApp 9000-3749 | Salmiya Co-op
Tel: 22253225 |
| Jahra Co-op
WhatsApp 5160-2458 | Jabriya Co-op
Tel: 1805-353
WhatsApp 6566-6084 |
| Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-6338 | Rawdha & Hawally
WhatsApp 9662-2883 |
| Nuzha Co-op
WhatsApp 9784-5531 | Shaab Co-op
WhatsApp 9090-4455 |
| Khaitan Co-op
WhatsApp 6777-9745 | Wafra Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-0539 |
| Ardhiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6902-0779 | Keifan Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-1719 |
| | Rehab Co-op
WhatsApp 9222-2358 |
| | Mishref Co-op
WhatsApp 5055-9900 |
| | Faiha Co-op
Tel: 1861-000
WhatsApp 9098-6000 |
| | Rumaithiya Co-op
WhatsApp 6066-0045 |
| | Bayan Co-op
WhatsApp 9004-2500 |
| | Fahaheel Co-op
WhatsApp 5178-9951 |
| | Adan & Qusour Co-op
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975 |
| | Salam Co-op
WhatsApp 9788-7832 |

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News in brief

Qiyam prayers allowed

KUWAIT: During the last 10 nights of Ramadan, qiyam ul-layl prayers can be held from midnight onwards at most mosques in Kuwait, the awqaf ministry announced. The tahajjud prayers will begin at midnight and must be wrapped up within 30 minutes. However, qiyam prayers are not permitted in Hawally, Nugra, Maidaan Hawally, Salmiya, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula.

Kuwait Embassy denies closure

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Embassy in Thailand denied reports spread on media on the closure of the embassy because one of its diplomats was infected with the coronavirus. In a statement yesterday, the embassy affirmed that it is still open during its normal working hours. It added that it will continue providing services to Kuwaiti citizens in Thailand and will answer their inquiries after working hours and during holidays on emergency number +66918909998.

9 COVID deaths, 1,429 cases

KUWAIT: The ministry of health on Friday reported nine new COVID-19 deaths and 1,429 infections in the past 24 hours. The ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad told KUNA the death toll rose to 1,563 and total caseload to 273,991 since the pandemic's outbreak. He added total recoveries reached 257,261 after 1,444 patients recovered. Sanad said 219 patients are being treated in intensive care units, where 15,167 patients are receiving healthcare. Over the past 24 hours, 9,865 tests were conducted, with an infection rate of 14.49 percent, taking total tests to 2,326,703.

Kuwait Heritage



A car passes through one of Kuwait wall's gates in the 1950s. The picture of the vehicle driving past two camel-riding Bedouins after passing through the gate draws a symbolic image of the entry of automobiles into Kuwait City, replacing traditional means of transportation. (Source: A collection of commemorative printed images by the ministry of information. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, ministry of information)

Ramadan Diwaniya

Sri Lanka gradually opening up to international tourism

'Ramadan is a time to share, supplicate, engage ourselves in prayers and not overeat'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Various ambassadors in Kuwait were interviewed by Kuwait Times to learn more about their local traditions and culture during Ramadan. We also asked about the current coronavirus situation in their respective countries and how they are handling and reacting to this pandemic.

Excerpts from Kuwait Times' interview with Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait Othman Lebi Mohammad Johar:

Kuwait Times: How is Sri Lanka managing the pandemic?

Othman Lebi Mohammad Johar: Sri Lanka is doing great in controlling the pandemic. To date, we only have 95,000 cases with a death toll of 598. Our country is an island nation and can only be accessed by air or sea if you are from overseas, so the chances of getting infected with COVID-19 are minimized. During the first wave of the pandemic, we managed to stop transmission by shutting down our borders, and we were able to stop the entry of the virus in the country at that time. Even our own people were temporarily not allowed to enter the country.

We imposed a lockdown at that time, limited travel and completely stopped the entry of foreigners. We stopped international tourism and did not allow home quarantine. Sri Lankans overseas are now allowed to enter the country provided they bear the hotel quarantine expenses for 14 days. Also, schools are gradually reopening, especially universities and colleges.

We are trying to bring back normalcy as quickly as possible. High schools and hopefully elementary schools will reopen soon. We are now allowing tourists to come from other countries provided they quarantine for 14 days. We have flights from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and China, and slowly we want to bring back tourists from other countries as well. The reason for the delay in some tourists to come is because other countries are also not allowing their nationals out of their own territories.

Kuwait Times: What about Sri Lankans in Kuwait? Are they safe? How were you able to manage the problems of Sri Lankans here during the time of lockdowns and curfews? What help did the embassy provide during the pandemic?

Johar: As per our government's stats, we have a total of 110,000 Sri Lankans here in Kuwait, with 70 percent of them working in the domestic labor sector. So I have minimal problem of nonpayment of salaries. Domestic helpers are at least safer since they are not allowed to leave the homes of their employers. The problem is when their sponsors have the virus, they cannot escape and get infected as well. We have had cases of domestic helpers who contracted the virus from their sponsors.

Some people really needed help at that time, especially those who were not receiving salaries. We distributed food packs to them. People from my country who died because of the coronavirus number around 40-50 - it's not an exact figure because the Kuwaiti government provides it to us and we only rely on their records. Many of the deaths were because of comorbidities.

Kuwait Times: About Ramadan's essence and traditions, can you share some unique celebrations in your country?

Johar: During my childhood, I used to fast with my parents. The good thing about being a Muslim in my country at that time during my school days was that we were allowed to leave school early in consideration of the fasting month. Also on Fridays, we were permitted to leave early for Friday prayers. Those are cherished moments, and practiced until now in my country.

We are a secular country, although we are majority Buddhist and Hindu. But we have minority Muslim and Christian schools and can practice our religion without any interference. The Muslim schools are for everyone. Anyone can attend, just like Catholic schools. The curriculum is the same and to the standard of the Sri Lankan education system, taught in the language of our choice.



Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait
Othman Lebi Mohammad Johar

School holidays are scheduled to coincide with religious celebrations.

Kuwait Times: What are the activities during the fasting month?

Johar: In Sri Lanka, just like many other countries, we break the fast at home with family members. Then we go to the nearby mosque to pray and receive kanji (congee or rice porridge). In mosques, companies sponsor iftar for those who are fasting. Normally, a bowl of kanji and three dates are enough for a hungry stomach. Sometimes meat is also served, depending on the sponsors.

That's the first food we consume after a whole day of fasting. Then we go home and eat the main course prepared by our mothers. In Sri Lanka, if you have no food, the mosque provides you with kanji, samosas or spring rolls, and sweets, while tea is also served. When I was little, we went from one mosque to another just to collect the food - we were happy doing this.

We believe the holy month of Ramadan is a time to share, supplicate, engage ourselves in prayers and not overeat. If you eat a lot, you will sleep and not pray. In fact, what is taught in Islam is to keep our stomach half empty, so that we can feel the pain and hunger of less-fortunate people. It is very un-Islamic for us to overeat. That's not in our culture.

Then we have the recitation of the Holy Quran in the mosque during nightly prayers. We also observe the last 10 days in search of laylatul qadr. Some mosques remain open and people stay there during the last 10 days, or the last three days. In the last 10 days, we give charity and distribute food to needy people.

Kuwait Times: How is women's participation in Islamic religious activities in your country, especially in Ramadan?

Johar: There is an increase in participation from women for prayers. Normally, they come along with their male counterparts to the mosque, but perform prayers separately. Women generally don't go to the mosque in other months, because they can pray at home. But during Ramadan we encourage them to participate in congregation prayers, as it is our belief that rewards are hundredfold. They can also visit the mosque for taraweeh prayers, which is very rewarding.

Kuwait Times: How is Eid Al-Fitr celebrated in your country?

Johar: Eid is a very festive occasion for us Sri Lankan Muslims. We normally celebrate with new clothes and gifts for kids. Our government issues a circular to companies to pay our salaries 15 days ahead of Eid so that we can prepare and buy gifts and new clothes. We are also allowed to take leave to be with our families. On Eid, we have community prayers, and after that we visit our relatives. For kids, that is the best part of the holiday, because when we visit our relatives, most likely we will get cash or gifts from them. Shops and markets also get business.

Kuwait Times
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RAMADAN QUIZ 2021

Kuwait Times annual Ramadan competition will publish every day throughout the holy month of Ramadan. All thirty coupons containing the correct answer must be sent to the newspaper to become eligible for the raffle draw. All coupons must be received on or before Monday 17 of May 2021. Winners will be announced in Kuwait Times.

ISSUE NO: 18424 RAMADAN 19, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

19- What was revealed during the month of Ramadan?

- A. Hadith
 B. Torah
 C. Quran
 D. Eid Al-Adha

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :
Name :
Civil ID :
Tel :
Email :

ISSUE NO: 18424 RAMADAN 20, 1442 AH

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

20- When can Muslims eat during Ramadan?

- A. Between sunrise and sunset
 B. Before sunrise and after sunset
 C. Never

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :
Name :
Civil ID :
Tel :
Email :

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Afghan retreat: US formally pulling out of its longest war

Blinken to show support on Ukraine trip after Russian troop movements

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Thousands join May Day rallies in Spain

China Labor Day travel rush gives glimpse of life after COVID

MADRID: Thousands of people joined May 1 rallies in more than 70 cities across Spain yesterday in the first Labor Day demonstrations since the pandemic began. Wearing masks and observing social distancing, demonstrators marched through the streets waving banners although in many places, numbers were capped to ensure anti-COVID measures were respected. The main demonstration in Madrid, which was limited to 1,000 people, began at midday (1000 GMT) under the slogan "Now it's time to deliver" with the participants marching from the town hall to the city's Puerta del Sol square.

Seven government ministers attended the march, including Labor Minister Yolanda Diaz as well as representatives of the three left-wing parties running in Tuesday's regional election in Madrid. At the rally, union leaders Pepe Alvarez of the UGT and the CCOO's Unai Sordo urged the government to honor commitments delayed by the pandemic, such as repealing a controversial labor reform, raising the minimum wage and approving a law on equal pay.

Addressing the march, Diaz said employment was key for overcoming the crisis. "The crisis has made us face up to an outdated labor model, based on casual work, seasonal employment and inequality, which is exactly what the labor ministry has started to change," she said in remarks broadcast on Spain's RNE radio. "This May 1 is not just any other day because the values of dignified employment, solidarity, equality and social justice—which are embodied today—are undoubtedly the most effective response to the economic and social crisis we're experiencing."

Spain has been badly hit by the pandemic and is due to receive 140 billion euros (\$167 billion) worth of EU funds between 2021 and 2026 to help its virus-battered economy.

But Alvarez said it was critical to ensure the funds were used "to face up to the needs of its citi-



BEIJING: People walk outside the Forbidden City during the Labor Day holiday in Beijing yesterday.—AFP

zens and... to make a change to its production model". In Barcelona, some 3,000 people joined the May Day marches, unions said, while in Mallorca, demonstrators joined a vehicle convoy in the capital Palma to avoid the rain, RTVE television reported.

Meanwhile, millions of travellers criss-crossed China as the Labor Day holiday got underway yesterday, packing out tourist sites, thronging restaurants and visiting family as the vast country edges towards life after COVID. The world's second largest economy is expecting some 265 million journeys by

road, train or boat during the five-day holiday, a transport ministry official said this week—numbers last seen in 2019 before the coronavirus struck.

Hundreds of day trippers packed out the walkway along the top of the Great Wall at Badaling, some 60 kilometers (37 miles) from downtown Beijing, with many not wearing masks. Ahead of the holiday on Friday, passengers thronged train stations across the country, with queues stretching across crowded departure halls. Although China's economy has bounced back from the coronavirus-

induced slowdown of last year, consumer activity has lagged behind the stronger rebound seen in the industrial production. But retail sales have since picked up, surging 34.2 percent on-year in March and painting a more optimistic picture of consumption demand. Key cities such as capital city Beijing, as well as Shanghai and Guangzhou, are expected to see greater demand this Labor Day holiday, said the transport official Li Huaqiang. "The number of people would have basically returned to levels seen in the same period in 2019," he added. — AFP

Mars Ingenuity helicopter given new mission

WASHINGTON: After proving powered, controlled flight is possible on the Red Planet, NASA's Mars Ingenuity helicopter has new orders: scout ahead of the Perseverance rover to assist in its search for past signs of microbial life. The next phase extends the rotocraft's mission beyond the original month-long technology demonstration. Now, the goal is to assess how well flyers can help future exploration of Mars and other worlds.

"We're going to gather information on the operational support capability of the helicopter while Perseverance focuses on its science mission," Lori Glaze, director of NASA's Planetary Science Division, told reporters Friday. The type of reconnaissance that Ingenuity performs could one day also prove useful to human missions, by scouting out the best paths for explorers to traverse, and reaching locations that aren't otherwise possible.

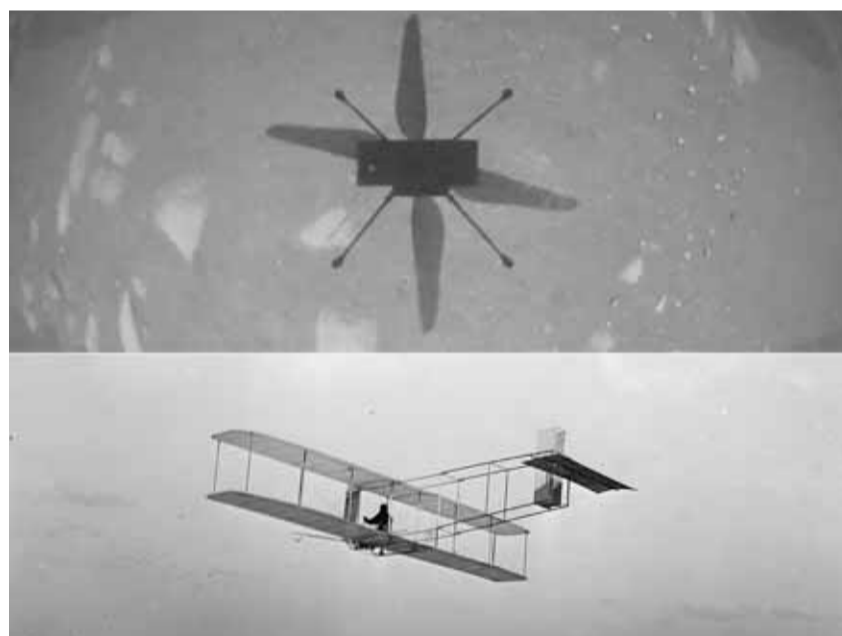
The four pound (1.8 kilogram) mini chopper successfully performed the fourth of its five originally planned flights on Friday, "going farther & faster than ever before," NASA

tweeted. The fifth is planned in the coming days, then its mission will be extended, initially by one Martian month. Whether it continues beyond that will depend on if it's still in good shape and if it's helping, rather than hindering, the rover's goals of collecting soil and rock samples for future lab analysis on Earth.

Chief engineer Bob Balaram predicted a limiting factor will be its ability to withstand the frigid Mars nights, where temperatures plunge to -130 degrees Fahrenheit (-90 degrees Celsius). Ingenuity keeps warm with a solar-powered heater, but it was only designed to last for a month and engineers aren't sure "how many freeze and thaw cycles (it) can go through before something breaks," he said.

NASA initially thought Perseverance would be driving away from the site where it landed at the Jezero Crater on February 18, just north of the planet's equator. That would have meant the rover leaving Ingenuity behind and moving beyond communications range.

Now though, the agency wants to



This combination of pictures shows NASA's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter captured in this shot as it hovered over the Martian surface.—AFP

keep Perseverance in the area for some time after finding a rocky outcrop that they believe contains some of the oldest material on the crater floor.

They hope to collect their first sample in July. Ingenuity's exploits have captured the public's imagination since it made its first flight on April 19, but

NASA said this wasn't a factor in its decision to allow the two robots to keep exploring Mars together.

"We really wish to spend a considerable amount of time where we are and so it's sort of a fortuitous alignment," said Perseverance project scientist Ken Farley. — AFP

Most UK women held in Syria are trafficking victims

LONDON: The majority of British women and children detained in displacement camps in northeast Syria are trafficking victims being failed by the UK government, rights group Reprieve said Friday.

The women, some who were as young as 12 when they were taken to Syria, were trafficked by the Islamic State group (IS) and subjected to sexual and other forms of exploitation, the UK-based NGO's investigation found. It accused the British government of "systematically failing" them through policies of blanket citizenship stripping, refusing repatriation and withholding basic consular assistance.

UK authorities have long grappled with how to handle the estimated 900 Britons who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the conflict there. Although hundreds have returned to the UK—with dozens then prosecuted—the government has revoked more than 150 people's citizenship and an unconfirmed number remain in the hands of pro-Western Kurdish militias in northeast Syria. Shamima Begum, who was just 15 when she and two other schoolgirls from London travelled to Syria to join the jihadists, is the most high-profile case.

She was stripped of her citizenship in 2019, and recently lost a long-running legal bid to return to appeal the decision. Reprieve, which estimates around 25 British adults and 34 UK children are still being held, urged London to reverse its policies.

"The complex dynamics of the situation of British women and children detained in NES (northeast Syria) can only be properly dealt with by the UK authorities when the families are repatriated to Britain," it said. "It is wrong to suggest that the UK can abandon these victims of trafficking." Siobhan Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur on the issue, wrote in a foreword to the report that Britain was failing to meet slavery and human trafficking commitments. "Urgent protection gaps now exist in relation to UK nationals," she wrote.

The NGO's probe relied on extensive research conducted in the region since 2017, including face-to-face interviews with detainees in Syrian camps as well as discussions with their relatives. At least 63 percent of the British women and children there are victims of trafficking, either transported as children, coerced into travelling there or kept and moved internally against their will, Reprieve said.

It concluded that IS used similar tactics to child sex trafficking gangs, grooming and recruiting hundreds of women and girls who were subsequently forced into marriage, sexual slavery and domestic servitude. In another report foreword Andrew Mitchell, a lawmaker from Britain's ruling Conservatives and a former international development minister, accused his government of having a "blind-spot" on the issue. — AFP

18 Iraqis killed in multiple jihadist raids

BAGHDAD: Eighteen Iraqis, the majority military personnel, were killed overnight Friday to Saturday in separate jihadist attacks mainly in the greater Baghdad area, security sources told AFP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks, but they are in line with the modus operandi of the Islamic State group, which still has sleeper cells in Iraq despite its territorial defeat in 2017. One attack targeted troops in Tarmiya, an agricultural suburb 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of the Iraqi capital.

"IS fighters attacked an Iraqi army convoy at night and killed two officers and two soldiers," a security official said, on condition of anonymity. Reinforcements were dispatched to the area but also came under fire, with "an officer and two soldiers" killed, the source said. A member of tribal fighters integrated into the regular forces that were then deployed to the scene was also killed, "along with a civilian caught in the crossfire", the source added.

Further north, in the central Alton Kubre region, "six peshmerga (Kurdish fighters) were killed when Islamic State group jihadists attacked their military position with light arms", another security official told AFP. Alton Kubre is a disputed area claimed by both the federal government in Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdistan authorities. Another attack took place in the western desert bordering Syria, a third security source said. "An officer and a soldier were killed in a bomb explosion while an army convoy was en route to Akashat," he said. — AFP

Algerians march against arrest of protesters

ALGIERS: Thousands of Algerians marched through the capital Friday denouncing what they said were sweeping arrests of members of the Hirak pro-democracy protest movement. "Police everywhere, justice nowhere", read one sign carried by the protesters. Local media websites and activists on social networks said police violently broke up the demonstration, with reports of arrests and violence in the capital. The "peaceful march (was) violently dispersed", Said Salhi, head of the Algerian League for Human Rights (LAD-DH), said on Twitter.

"Escalation of police violence against journalists covering the Friday marches in Algeria," media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) tweeted. Marches also took place in other parts of the country, including Annaba, Constantine, Kabylie, Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou.

Salhi said authorities detained protesters at several demonstrations. The march in Algiers was seen as a test of the Hirak's popularity, after police stopped a student march in the capital on Tuesday, arresting around 20 people. When the demonstrators were released, they had to sign a document pledging to refrain from participating in weekly Hirak marches or arrest, said Salhi. "It is intimidation and a way of exerting pressure

to weaken the Hirak," he said.

The National Committee for the Liberation of Prisoners (CNLD) estimates around 70 people are in prison over their links with the Hirak or other peaceful opposition political activity. Despite high temperatures and people fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, large crowds marched through Algiers for "Friday 115," the number of weeks since the Hirak protesters began on February 22, 2019. "Release our children so that they fast with us during this Ramadan," chanted the protesters. The demonstrators also repeated their opposition to the country's forthcoming legislative elections in June. The head of the electoral authority (ANIE), Mohamed Charfi, said this week that 1,730 lists — 818 party lists and 912 "independent lists"—had registered for the polls.

But he said only 19 parties out of the 39 that had submitted their documents "meet the legal requirements". The Hirak protest movement was sparked over president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in office.

The ailing autocrat was forced to step down weeks later, but the Hirak has continued its demonstrations, demanding a sweeping overhaul of a ruling system in place since Algeria's independence from France in 1962. On Thursday, Algeria released on probation Karim Tabbou, a leading opposition activist, after his arrest the day before. Tabbou, who was handed a one-year suspended sentence last year for "undermining state security", was charged on eight counts, including "slander", after he allegedly heckled an official during a funeral. Tabbou and other government opponents have pledged to boycott the upcoming polls. — AFP

International

Blinken to show support on Ukraine trip after Russian troop movements

Moscow deploys 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders and in Crimea

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Ukraine next week in a show of "unwavering" support after Russian troops amassed on its border, the State Department said Friday. Russia in recent weeks deployed up to 100,000 troops near Ukraine's northern and eastern borders as well as in Crimea, which Moscow seized in 2014, raising concerns of a major escalation. Moscow announced on April 23 that it had started withdrawing its forces, bringing at least momentary relief in Kiev. Blinken's visit Wednesday and Thursday is intended "to reaffirm unwavering US support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's ongoing aggression," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Blinken will meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and also push for action against corruption, a longstanding demand by Western partners of Ukraine, Price said. Philip Reeker, the top US diplomat for Europe, was cautious on judging Russia's intentions, telling reporters that the United States will "monitor that situation very closely." "We have made very clear in our engagement with the Russian government that they should refrain from escalatory actions and aggressive activity," Reeker said, also renewing concern about ongoing Russian exercises in the Black Sea. Blinken's trip comes as President Joe Biden ramps up pressure on Russia but also prepares

for a summit he has proposed with his counterpart Vladimir Putin in hopes of stabilizing the relationship.

"This is the old-fashioned business of secretaries of state, going places to have photo-ops to say, yes, the United States is interested in you and supports the government in charge on various policy issues," said Yuval Weber, an expert on Russia and Eurasia at the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute and Texas A&M's Bush School of Government and Public Service in Washington. Weber said that Russia's recent show of force was intended to send a message to the new Biden administration—and will keep Ukraine on edge.

While Russia pulled back troops after its exercises, it left defense equipment in the border regions, in what Weber said was a clear parallel to Moscow's preparations before its offensive with Georgia in 2008. "The troop buildup has been to some extent normalized, so the next time there is a troop buildup it will be a little less surprising," Weber said. Russia has signaled "that we have great capabilities to do something in the future, and they can instill additional insecurity in the Ukrainian body politic and Ukrainian mind."

Zelensky has pointed to the Russian troop movements to ask for a fast-track into NATO membership, a prospect opposed by Western Europeans concerned about Russia's response and which has met a cool reception in Washington. More than 13,000 peo-



KHERSON, Ukraine: This file picture shows Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (center) speaking with servicemen during his visit of Ukrainian army's outposts in the Kherson region, on the administrative border with Russia-annexed Crimea. — AFP

ple have died in Ukraine since 2014 in the only active fighting on European soil as Kiev battles pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk

regions. A ceasefire that took hold last July has been shredded, with clashes sharply increasing between Ukrainian forces and separatists since January. — AFP

News in brief

Portugal reopens Spain border

LISBON: Portugal reopened its land border with Spain yesterday and began the final stage of its program to ease COVID-19 restrictions. The country was hit hard at the start of the year by a wave that saw 300 coronavirus deaths a day overwhelm hospitals. But the measures have since helped bring the numbers down, with zero fatalities recorded on Friday for the second time in a week—the previous day without a COVID death was in August. Earlier in the week, Prime Minister Antonio Costa announced the fourth and last stage of the deconfinement plan would begin Saturday—two days earlier than had been planned. —AFP

Colombia president axes tax plan

BOGOTA: Colombian President Ivan Duque caved in Friday to widespread anger and said he would overhaul a proposed tax reform that many said would leave them poorer during the pandemic. Duque announced he was shelving clauses that would lower the income tax threshold to broaden the tax base and raise value-added taxes on goods and services. He acted two days after tens of thousands of Colombians took to the streets across the country to denounce the proposed tax changes. They were rejected across the board by opposition parties, unions, students and civil society groups that complained that the reforms came at the worst possible time and were particularly harmful to the middle class. —AFP

DR Congo 'state of siege' plan

KINSHASA, DR Congo: The Democratic Republic of Congo announced a "state of siege" late Friday in two provinces in the east of the country wracked by violence from armed groups and civilian massacres. "Taking into account the gravity of the situation... the president informed the cabinet of his decision to proclaim a state of siege in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri," said Patrick Muyaya. He said details of what the measure would entail would be released publicly in the next few hours. Under DRC's constitution, the president can declare either a state of emergency or a state of siege "if severe circumstances immediately threaten the independence or integrity of the national territory, or if they interrupt the regular functioning of institutions". —AFP

Houston home human smuggling probe

HOUSTON: US authorities opened an investigation Friday into a possible human smuggling operation after police in Houston found more than 90 people crammed into a home in the Texas city. Assistant Police Chief DB Edwards said police were initially alerted to the house in a southwest Houston neighborhood by a report of a kidnapping. "When they got inside the house they realized this is actually going to turn into a human smuggling investigation," Edwards told reporters. "It was a big surprise when we got in the house and saw what we saw." —AFP

WHO lists Moderna vaccine for use

GENEVA: The World Health Organization on Friday said it had listed the anti-COVID-19 Moderna vaccine for emergency use. The listing procedure helps countries unable to assess a vaccine's effectiveness themselves have access as quickly as possible and allow the Covax vaccine sharing scheme and other partners to distribute it to poorer countries. The US vaccine is the fifth jab to earn WHO's emergency listing. —AFP

Tigray conflict: Six months on, no end in sight

ADDIS ABABA: It has been six months since Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray for a military campaign he vowed would be swift and targeted. But violence rumbles on, and reports continue to emerge of massacres, rape and widespread hunger.

How did we get here?

Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, sent troops into Ethiopia's northernmost region in November to detain and disarm leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the regional ruling party that had dominated national politics for three decades. He said the move came in response to TPLF attacks on army camps. It also followed months of tensions, including Tigray's holding of unauthorized elections. The TPLF initially denied firing the first shots and said Abiy was seeking an excuse to invade the region.

How bad is the fighting?

After a few weeks of air strikes and heavy fighting, federal forces took control of the regional capital Mekele in late November. Abiy declared victory and his government downplayed the

Venezuela's 'doctor of the poor' takes step to sainthood

CARACAS: A Venezuelan physician who died more than 100 years ago and is revered as a "doctor of the poor" for his selfless service during a previous pandemic, was beatified by the Catholic Church Friday, a step towards sainthood. The ceremony in Caracas was long-awaited by many Venezuelans, and was initially due to be held in a large stadium with thousands of people in attendance, but was scaled down due to the coronavirus pandemic. Pope Francis signed the beatification decree for Jose Gregorio Hernandez in July last year after a miracle attributed to the late bacteriologist was recognized by the Church.

Yaxury Solorzano, a 10-year-old girl, was shot in the head in 2017. Doctors said she would be permanently brain damaged if she survived, but Solorzano recovered after her mother prayed to Hernandez. Hernandez was born in 1864, studied in Paris, Berlin, Madrid and New York, and died in Caracas in 1919 after

being struck by a car. The beatification took place amid a surge of coronavirus cases in Venezuela, a century after Hernandez became known as the "doctor of the poor" for his care of patients during another major global pandemic, the Spanish flu. He gave free care to the poorest. Solorzano and her family attended along with relatives of the doctor.

Pope's message

Despite organizers urging people to mark the event in a safe manner by turning their homes into "small temples", a few hundred faithful gathered outside a church in the neighborhood of La Candelaria, where Hernandez's remains were held until last year, when they were exhumed for the beatification. Flowers and a Venezuelan flag were placed on the street corner where he died. In a message to mark the occasion, Pope Francis hailed Hernandez as "a man of universal service." "I confess to you



CARACAS: General view of the chapel of La Salle College High School at the foot of El Avila hill where the beatification ceremony of Venezuelan doctor Jose Gregorio Hernandez will take place, in Caracas. — AFP

that I have never met a Venezuelan... who, halfway through the conversation, did not finally say to me: when will Gregorio be beatified? They carried it in their souls. Well, now this wish is being fulfilled," he said.

The pontiff said the ceremony was happening in a particularly difficult time for Venezuela. "I am aware that your prolonged suffering and anguish have been aggravated by the

terrible Covid-19 pandemic that is affecting us all," he said. "I also have in mind all those who have left the country in search of better living conditions, as well as those who are deprived of their freedom and those who lack the necessities of life." The pope urged people to view the beatification as a moment of national unity, "gathered around the figure of the people's doctor." — AFP

Chad army says killed 'several hundred' rebels

N'DJAMENA, Chad: The army in Chad said Friday it had wiped out "several hundred" rebels over two days of fighting in the country's west, where President Idriss Deby Itno suffered mortal wounds at the front line this month. The army has since mid-April been fighting the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), drawn mainly from the Goran ethnic group, in the Kanem desert region along the border with Niger. "On April 29, the defense and security forces finished dealing with the rebel band that intruded towards Nokou in northern Kanem," army spokesman Azem Bermendoa Agouna said in a statement. Nokou is around 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital N'Djamena.

Agouna tallied "several hundred rebels neutralized (and) 66 taken prisoner" while six soldiers were killed. The military earlier said it had lost a helicopter during the fighting due to a "technical fault" but the rebels say they shot it down. The rebels have threatened to march on N'Djamena, where a team from the African Union arrived Thursday to assess the situation and examine ways of a speedy return to democratic rule. Immediately after Deby's death, a junta dubbed the Transitional Military Council (TMT) was quickly formed, chaired by Mahamat Idriss Deby, the late president's son, and made up of generals. Assuming the title of president, the younger Deby dissolved the National Assembly and vowed to hold "free and democratic" elections in 18 months. Deby, 68, died on April 19 from wounds he suffered fighting the Libya-based rebels, according to the authorities. A career soldier who seized power in 1990 and exercised it ruthlessly for 30 years, Deby died on the day that the electoral commission confirmed that he had won a landslide victory, the

authorities say. FACT is led by Mahamat Mahadi Ali, a veteran insurgent who previously lived in France. It was formed in 2016 and has been based in southern Libya. The group vowed to pursue its offensive after a pause for Deby's funeral on April 23. Experts believe FACT has between 1,500 and 2,000 fighters.

Protests immediately erupted after the junta took power and claimed the lives of at least six people, according to officials. Chadian police have denied opposition claims that they fired live bullets on demonstrators. The younger Deby, under domestic and international pressure, has offered a "national dialogue" on the way forward. Chad is a kelly ally of the West in the fight against jihadists in the restive Sahel region. It has well-respected armed forces and hosts the headquarters of France's 5,100-strong Barkhane anti-jihadist mission. It also partners Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in a regional anti-jihad coalition called the G5 Sahel. The unrest in Chad has once again put the spotlight on lawlessness in neighboring Libya. — AFP

International

Afghan retreat: US formally pulling out of its longest war

Withdrawal heralds an uncertain future for country

KABUL: The United States formally begins withdrawing its last troops from Afghanistan yesterday, bringing its longest war nearer to an end but also heralding an uncertain future for a country in the tightening grip of an emboldened Taliban. US officials on the ground say the withdrawal is already a work in progress—and May 1 is just a continuation—but Washington has made an issue of the date because it is a deadline agreed with the Taliban in 2020 to complete the pullout. The skies above Kabul and nearby Bagram airbase have been buzzing with more US helicopter activity than usual as the pullout gears up, following the start Thursday of a concurrent NATO withdrawal.

Afghan security forces were on high alert yesterday for any possible attacks on retreating US troops. “The Americans will formally begin their withdrawal from Afghanistan starting May 1 and the Taliban might increase the violence,” Acting Interior Minister Hayatullah Hayat told top police commanders, according to an audio clip given to reporters. Afghan National Security Council adviser Hamdullah Mohib said the Taliban “may choose war” in an attempt to grab power after US troops fully exit, but security forces were ready to face the insurgents.

The prospect of an end to the US presence after 20 years comes despite fighting raging across the countryside in the absence of a peace deal. A stark reminder of what remains came late Friday with a car bomb in Pul-e-Alam, south of the capital, killing at least 24 people and wounding 110 more. US President Joe Biden is determined to end what he called “the forever war”, announcing last month that the withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 American forces would be complete by the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. “A horrific attack 20 years ago... cannot explain why we should remain there in 2021,” he said.

The Taliban said the US troop withdrawal was to be completed by May 1 as agreed in last year’s

accord with Washington, and it was a “clear violation” that the troops were not fully out. “This in principle opens the way for our mujahideen to take appropriate action against the invading forces,” Mohammad Naeem, a Taliban spokesman told AFP, adding that the group was awaiting orders from its leaders. Since the US withdrawal deal was struck the Taliban have not directly engaged foreign troops, but insurgents have mercilessly attacked government forces in the countryside and waged a terror campaign in urban areas.

The exit of US forces has only exacerbated the fear felt by ordinary Afghans. “Everyone is scared that we might go back to the dark days of the Taliban era,” said Mena Nowrozi, who works at a private radio station in Kabul. “The Taliban are still the same; they have not changed. The US should have extended their presence by at least a year or two,” she told AFP.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani insists that government forces—which for months have carried out most of the ground fighting against the Taliban—are “fully capable” of keeping the insurgents at bay. He said the pullout also means the Taliban have no reason to fight. “Who are you killing? What are you destroying? Your pretext of fighting the foreigners is now over,” Ghani said in a speech this week.

Worst-case analysis

Still, General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, has not ruled out total chaos. “On the worst-case analysis, you have a potential collapse of the government, a potential collapse of the military,” he said earlier this week. “You have a civil war and all the humanitarian catastrophe that goes with it.” Police officer Abdul Malik from the former insurgent bastion of Kandahar said they were prepared. “We have to take care of our homeland... We will do our best to defend our soil,” he told AFP.

The US-led military onslaught in Afghanistan began in October 2001 in the aftermath of the



KABUL: Afghan former interpreters for the US and NATO forces gather during a demonstration in downtown Kabul on Friday, on the eve of the beginning of Washington’s formal troop withdrawal —AFP

September 11 attacks. Two decades later, and after the death of almost 2,400 Americans and tens of thousands of Afghans, Biden says the final withdrawal was justified as US forces had now made sure the country cannot again become a base for foreign jihadists to plot against the West. Concerns are high that the Taliban might yet strike at retreating US forces, and in the southern province of Kandahar—where the foes used to clash regularly—security sources say several areas are laden with explosives planted by the insurgents.

“If the Taliban attack retreating US or allied forces, it would be to bloody the nose of a defeated enemy and to humiliate it further,” said Afghanistan specialist Nishank Motwani. Andrew Watkins, of the International Crisis Group, said the coming months would see the situation become a more purely local conflict. “The United States and its NATO partners are stepping back and giving the two primary sides of this conflict... their first instance to fight with and assess their opponents without the extra factor of the United States,” he said. —AFP

Bomb blasts, protests as Myanmar enters 4th month under junta

YANGON: Explosions blasted off throughout Myanmar’s largest city Yangon yesterday as protesters held flash marches for democracy, defying a brutal junta that has held onto power for three blood-drenched months. The country has been in an uproar since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, bringing an abrupt end to Myanmar’s short-lived experiment with democracy. The power grab triggered a massive uprising, which authorities have tried to quell by deploying lethal force and live ammunition.

As Myanmar entered its fourth month under military rule yesterday, protesters in commercial hub Yangon—an epicenter of unrest with a heavy security presence—staged flash demonstrations, marching rapidly through the streets to avoid confrontation with police and soldiers. “We have the truth. Only the truth will prevail,” read a banner that protesters hoisted up as they marched quickly through a neighborhood,

flashing the three-finger salute of defiance. In Yangon’s Insein township, a bomb blast went off around 10 am near a local school, said a resident staying nearby. “Some security forces came to check the blast area, but I only watched from a distance from my home because I was worried they would arrest me,” he told AFP, adding that he saw smoke rising.

By afternoon, another two blasts went off in Yankin, further south, according to locals living in the leafy residential township. “I heard it from my place, I thought it was thunder,” a resident told AFP, adding that the explosions left the security forces nervous. It remains unclear if anyone was injured by the blasts. No one has claimed responsibility for the bombs—which are exploding with increasing frequency in Yangon. “They (the junta) have made people live in fear and it is good to have them on edge as well,” the Yankin resident said.

He also praised the flash protesters for their ingenuity to evade arrest and crackdowns. “Any show of defiance without getting captured or killed is great for the resistance.” Nearly 760 civilians have been killed in the anti-coup unrest, according to a local monitoring group, though the junta has recorded a far lower death toll. Deposed leader Suu Kyi has been under house arrest since the military



YANGON: Protesters hold up the three finger salute as they march with banners during a demonstration against the military coup in Thingangyun township in Yangon on Friday. —AFP

detained her on February 1. The junta has hit her with a barrage of charges, including sedition and Myanmar’s state secrets law. Coup-maker Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has continuously justified the putsch as necessary to protect democracy, alleging fraud in November’s election, which Suu Kyi’s party won in a landslide. —AFP

UN Council calls for ASEAN Myanmar plan to be enacted

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council called Friday for an immediate end to violence in Myanmar as stated in an ASEAN plan, giving unanimous approval to a statement watered down to satisfy China and Russia. The plan, which also calls for the naming of an envoy from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to address the crisis triggered by the February 1 military coup, should be applied “without delay,” the council statement says. It was approved after a closed-door meeting of the council and forced Western countries to make concessions to China—Myanmar’s main backer—and Russia to win passage.

At their request the council eliminated clauses that

said it “once again strongly condemned violence against peaceful protestors” and “reiterated their call on the military to exercise utmost restraint.” A diplomat speaking on condition of anonymity explained the changes saying “what we must avoid is losing council unity to the point of making it irrelevant.” Since the coup in Myanmar, the council has approved four statements on the crisis including this latest one of Friday. All of them were toned down under pressure from China.

Friday’s session was convened by Vietnam to present the conclusions of a recent ASEAN summit in Indonesia. The statement that was ultimately passed calls for the UN Special Envoy to Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, who is currently touring the region, to be able to visit Myanmar “as soon as possible.” Schraner Burgener gave a report on her long meeting with Myanmar junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing, held on the sidelines of the ASEAN meeting last weekend. Diplomats said the envoy, who is currently based in Bangkok, once again had her request for a vis-

built sub was lying on the sea floor more than 800 meters (2,600 feet) deep. The eerie images were final confirmation that there was no hope of finding survivors. On Friday, victims’ families cast flower petals from a navy ship into waters where the sub went down as part of a remembrance ceremony. Many wept and hugged as one could be heard saying “bye, bye daddy”, while a couple of relatives collapsed as they were overcome with grief.

The submarine—one of five in Indonesia’s fleet—disappeared last week while it was scheduled to take part in live torpedo training exercises. The crew asked for permission to dive. It lost contact shortly after. Later, search teams spotted an oil spill where the vessel was thought to have submerged, pointing to possible fuel tank damage and a catastrophic accident. The military has yet to offer an official explanation for the sinking of the decades-old submarine, which was delivered to the Southeast Asian nation in 1981. It has said, however, that the reconditioned vessel was seaworthy and discounted the possibility of an explosion.

The navy has said that the submarine may have suffered a blackout and left the crew unable to perform emergency measures. Its hull would have been torn apart as it sunk to depths far below what the KRI Nanggala was built to withstand, they said. The

it to Myanmar denied.

During the meeting, Brunei, which currently holds the presidency of ASEAN, floated the idea of a joint visit to Myanmar by the UN envoy and her future ASEAN counterpart. “We estimate around 20,000 internal displacements and almost 10,000 fleeing to neighboring countries since February. The regional implications require urgent action,” Schraner Burgener told the council, according to the text of her speech, which was seen by AFP.

“The common aspiration for democracy has united the people of Myanmar across religious, ethnic and communal divides like never before. Such strong unity has created unexpected difficulties for the military in consolidating power and stabilizing the coup,” she added. Nearly 760 civilians have been killed by police and soldiers in the past three months, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). The junta puts the death toll at 258 dead by April 15, calling the demonstrators “rioters” who engaged in “acts of terrorism.” —AFP



SEMARANG, Indonesia: Naval officers throw a flower garland into the sea at the port of Semarang, as sign of respect for the submarine that disappeared off the coast of Bali. —AFP

submarine’s former commander, Rear Admiral Muhammad Ali, has told local media that a so-called internal solitary wave could have been to blame. The natural phenomenon occurs when different sea depths come together, creating forces that could have dragged the vessel down, he said. The disaster was among a string of fatal submarine accidents over the past few decades. Among the worst was the 2000 sinking of the Kursk, the pride of Russia’s Northern Fleet. —AFP

News in brief

Istanbul police detain dozens

ISTANBUL: Istanbul police detained dozens of people who were trying to hold a May Day rally in the city yesterday in defiance of a ban ordered amid the coronavirus pandemic. At least 100 demonstrators were detained as they attempted to walk to Taksim Square, a traditional area of protest, AFP correspondents said, and in other areas nearby including the popular Istiklal Avenue. Police officers pushed a crowd back forcefully using their shields, while other officers dragged protesters away, a correspondent said. The Istanbul branch of the Contemporary Lawyers’ Association said 170 people were detained. —AFP

Pentagon cancels border projects

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon said Friday that it was canceling all US-Mexico border wall construction projects paid for with military funds. Former US president Donald Trump had ordered the diversion of billions of dollars in Pentagon money to pay for the barrier after being denied funding by Congress. President Joe Biden announced a halt to border wall construction after taking office in January. “Consistent with the president’s proclamation, the Department of Defense is proceeding with canceling all border barrier construction projects paid for with funds originally intended for other military missions,” deputy Pentagon spokesman Jamal Brown said. —AFP

US probes ‘Havana syndrome’ attacks

WASHINGTON: US senators said Friday that the government is investigating an apparent increase in mysterious directed-energy attacks dubbed “Havana syndrome”, amid new reports of potentially brain-damaging incidents inside the country. Democratic Senator Mark Warner and Republican Marco Rubio, who lead the Senate Intelligence Committee, issued a statement after two media reports saying attacks had taken place in Washington, including just outside the White House, and in Miami, Florida. “For nearly five years, we have been aware of reports of mysterious attacks on United States government personnel in Havana, Cuba and around the world,” they said.

Cameroon separatists kill 4 soldiers

DOUALA, Cameroon: Cameroonian separatists killed four government soldiers in the country’s west Friday, a regional governor said, the latest violence in a bloody independence struggle by English-speaking rebels. The Northwest and Southwest regions of the west African nation have seen vicious fighting in the past four years, with the UN and international aid groups saying both army troops and anglophone rebels have committed abuses and crimes against civilians. Overnight from Thursday to Friday, “separatists attacked the forward military post in Menfoung, leaving four soldiers dead and one seriously wounded,” West regional governor Augustine Awa Fonka told state broadcaster CRTV. —AFP

Omar Radi breaks hunger strike

RABAT: Jailed Moroccan journalist Omar Radi has suspended his three-week hunger strike due to a “significant deterioration” of his health, his father said Friday. Radi and fellow journalist Soulaïmane Raïssouni began hunger strikes earlier in April demanding to be provisionally released, having been held in detention for months awaiting a verdict on their cases. Radi, 34, decided to “temporarily suspend his hunger strike” due to “the significant deterioration of his health over the past two days”, his father Driss Radi said on Facebook. Raïssouni, on hunger strike for 23 days, continues his protest.

Indonesia to salvage submarine after sinking disaster

BALI: Indonesia said Friday it will salvage a submarine that sank off the coast of Bali, as grieving relatives paid their respects to the dozens of crew killed in the disaster. Authorities had yet to confirm if they would try to haul up the KRI Nanggala 402 from the sea floor after it was spotted cracked in three pieces. The navy on Friday said it was waiting on the arrival of two ships, including a vessel sent by China, that are equipped to handle deep-sea salvage operations. High-powered magnets and air balloons were among the possible options, but how and when the cracked submarine would be brought to the surface was uncertain, said navy chief Yudo Margono. “It’s hard to talk about specific timing, but I can say that as soon as help arrives, we’ll start,” he told reporters.

The submarine’s 53-strong crew are believed to still be inside the vessel, Margono said. An underwater rescue vehicle supplied by neighboring Singapore gave visual confirmation that the German-

Business

SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021

Burgan Bank reports 36% growth in Q1 2021; operating profit KD 27m

Bank continues to progress on its digitalization journey

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank K.P.S.C. (Burgan" or "Bank) announced its financial results for the first quarter ending on 31st March 2021.

Burgan reported Revenue of KD 48 million for Q1 2021, driven by higher Non-Interest Income (up 34 percent vs Q4 2020). Burgan continued to exhibit strong cost discipline leading to lower operating expenses of KD 21 million in Q1 2021 (reduced by 27 percent vs Q4 2020). These factors resulted in strong operating profit of KD 27 million (up 36 percent vs Q4 2020). Provision Charge for Q1'21 was also lower by KD 2mn compared to Q4'20. Burgan reported Net Income of KD 5 million for the quarter.

Key Performance indicators as at 31st March 2021 are as follows:

- NPL Coverage Ratio: 169%
- CAR: 17%

- Liquidity Coverage Ratio: 152%
- Net Stable Funding Ratio: 105%

During the quarter, Burgan continued to progress on its digitalization Journey and launched its New Burgan Prepaid card portal and app. Burgan also successfully launched its first Interactive Teller Machine (ITM) machine at Marina Mall to give its customers continued access.

Commenting on the results, Majed Essa Al-Ajeel, Chairman of Burgan Bank Group said, "Global economy continues to face challenges due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed. We expect Kuwait's economy to recover its growth momentum over the next two quarters on the back of increasing vaccinations. Burgan continues to deliver resilient performance despite these challenges and the team is making strong progress to further strengthen the bank's operat-

ing model by investing in digitalization efforts."

Masoud M J Hayat, Vice Chairman and Group CEO, Burgan Bank Group, added, "Burgan is continuing to deliver results while maintaining strong liquidity and capital metrics despite the difficult operating environment. Burgan has continued to improve its operating efficiency through focused cost optimization efforts. We continue to make solid progress on digital enhancements and this quarter also was no exception. Burgan is also strengthening its Cybersecurity Framework given the increased usage of online channels".

The consolidated financials encompass the results of the Group's operations in Kuwait, and its share of results from its subsidiaries, Burgan Bank Turkey, Gulf Bank Algeria, Bank of Baghdad and Tunis International Bank. Through this regional reach, Burgan Bank has one of the



Majed Essa Al-Ajeel

Masoud M J Hayat

largest regional branch networks with 162 branches across Kuwait, Turkey, Algeria, Iraq, Tunisia, Lebanon and a representative office in the United Arab Emirates.

Sri Lanka declares worst economic slump in 73 years

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced Friday that its economy shrank 3.6 percent last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, making it the worst downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

The unprecedented recession compared with a 2.3 percent GDP growth in 2019, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said in its annual report for 2020. It hoped the economy would rebound in 2021 and record an optimistic six percent growth on the back of improved local manufacturing and services.

"The pandemic has also offered an opportunity to reset the economy's focus and to address long-standing structural weaknesses and establish a production-based, productivity-driven economy," the bank said. The pandemic hit the island's lucrative tourism sector while sharp contractions were seen in construction, manufacturing as well as in services, the bank said.

It said the central government's debt also rose to 101 percent of GDP last year, up from 86.8 percent of GDP in the previous year, underscoring the debt crisis faced by the South Asian nation.

International rating agencies have expressed fears for Sri Lanka's ability to service its huge foreign debt as the country's foreign reserves fell sharply in the past year. The island's economy was trying to recover from the effects of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people when the pandemic hit in early 2020. Two weeks ago, Sri Lanka secured a \$500 million loan from China to shore up its foreign exchange reserves as the local currency came under intense pressure and fell to a record low. Chinese influence in the South Asian nation has been growing in recent years through loans and projects under its vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, raising concerns among regional powers and Western nations.

Between 2005 and 2015, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for expensive infrastructure projects. Sri Lanka was forced to hand over its strategic Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese company in 2017 after it was unable to service the \$1.4 billion debt from Beijing used to build it. —AFP

Fresh COVID cases put NZ-Australia travel bubble at risk

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's fledgling quarantine-free travel arrangement with Western Australia faced disruption for the second time in eight days yesterday following fresh community cases of COVID-19 in Perth. A worker at a managed isolation facility in the city and two people he shares accommodation with have tested positive, authorities said.

Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan said the state would not go into lockdown "at this point". But New Zealand health ministry officials said they had conducted a "rapid" assessment and had "determined scheduled direct flights from Western Australia to New Zealand should be immediately paused while a further assessment is carried out."

A flight scheduled to arrive in Auckland from Perth at 5:50am Sunday (1750 GMT Saturday) has been cancelled, but travel to other Australian states and territories is not affected. It is the second such disruption since the two countries opened their quarantine-free travel bubble on April 18, almost 400 days after both closed their international borders due to the pandemic.

Flights between New Zealand and Western Australia were suspended less than a week later, when the Perth and Peel regions were sent into a three-day lockdown after recording a case of community transmission on April 23. —AFP

US oil giants return to profitability in Q1 on oil prices

NEW YORK: After a string of losses, ExxonMobil and Chevron on Friday both reported a return to profitability in the first quarter, bolstered by a significant jump in oil prices.

The results, which come amid a similar round of profits by Royal Dutch Shell, Total and other European petroleum giants, point to a much-improved demand outlook compared with last year, when oil prices tumbled midway through the first quarter as the coronavirus crisis shuttered large parts of the economy. "Earnings strengthened primarily due to higher oil prices as the economy recovers," said Chevron Chief Executive Mike Wirth. Yet larger petroleum companies still face major challenges, including campaigns from activist shareholders at annual meetings next month over their response to climate change.

Both US oil firms also face weakness in their downstream business amid tepid demand for petroleum products, especially jet fuel. ExxonMobil, which reported losses in all four quarters in 2020, reported profits of \$2.7 billion in the first quarter. Revenues rose 5.3 percent to \$59.1 billion.

The company said its average price for crude oil sold rose 42 percent compared with the fourth quarter, while natural gas prices rose by 33 percent. Conditions in the downstream business improved from the fourth quarter, "but remained below 10-year lows driven by market oversupply

and high product inventory levels," ExxonMobil said. But the company saw heady conditions in its chemical business, where profits surged due to "continued strong demand, global shipping constraints and ongoing supply disruptions, particularly in North America."

At Chevron, which reported losses the last three quarters, earnings came in at \$1.4 billion, down 61.7 percent from the year-ago period, due in part to a steep drop in downstream profits.

Revenues rose 1.7 percent to \$32 billion. Chevron also benefited from higher oil prices compared with the 2020 period, although international natural gas prices fell in the most recent quarter compared with the year-ago period.

Climate showdown ahead

With companies like Total and BP undertaking renewable energy investment and committing to net-zero emissions targets, the US oil giants are under increased pressure to address climate change. ExxonMobil said it made progress on its "energy transition strategy," which would see it develop large-scale projects for carbon capture and storage (CCS).

ExxonMobil Chief Executive Darren Woods rejected using solar and wind investment as a "litmus test" for a company's commitment to climate change, saying on an analyst conference call that the oil giant is "at the early stages of a new business" with CCS. However, for the business to take off, there will be need to be government policies to incentivize carbon reductions as well as new frameworks for storing carbon dioxide and installing pipelines and facilities, Woods said.

At its annual meeting next month, the oil giant faces a challenge from activist investor group Engine No. 1, which has nominated competing

Coup, virus driving half of Myanmar into poverty: UN

YANGON: Half of Myanmar's population could be living in poverty next year, driven by the combination of the pandemic and the political crisis sparked by the military coup, the UN said Friday.

The dire warning came as renewed fighting between the Myanmar military and armed ethnic rebels sent more refugees fleeing across the jungle border with Thailand. Myanmar-already hit hard by coronavirus—was plunged into turmoil when the military seized power on February 1, ousting the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup sparked a massive protest movement calling for a return to democracy, which the security forces have sought to quell with a brutal crackdown.

More than 750 civilians have been killed, according to a local monitoring group, while a widespread anti-junta civil disobedience movement has throttled large parts of the economy. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said that by early 2022 as many as 25 million people, or nearly half the population, could be living below the poverty line. UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said the crisis could reverse progress made since 2005, which has seen Myanmar halve the number of people living in poverty. "Without functioning democratic institutions, Myanmar faces a tragic and avoidable backslide towards levels of poverty not seen in a generation," Steiner said in a statement.

Villagers flee air raids

The junta's crackdown on protests has drawn the ire of some of Myanmar's myriad ethnic armies, many of which have been battling the military for decades in border regions in the country's north and east. Several have condemned the military and come out in support of the protest movement, offering shelter to fleeing activists in the territory they control.

Clashes between the military and the Karen National Union (KNU), one of the leading rebel



Volunteers attending to displaced Thai residents at Mae Hong Son province, who fled their area near the Thailand-Myanmar border due to the fighting between Myanmar government troops and Karen National Union rebels. —AFP

groups, have escalated since the coup. The KNU have seized and razed military posts and the junta has responded with repeated air strikes in the rebels' Karen state heartland. Thai and KNU officials said there were fresh air strikes and fighting on Friday. The violence has caused alarm among civilians in the area, driving many to flee across a river border to seek safety in Thailand. The Thai authorities said a total of 2,267 Myanmar nationals had crossed into the kingdom's Mae Hong Son province to escape the fighting, and had been taken to dedicated shelters. KNU head of foreign affairs Padoh Saw Taw Nee told AFP that more than 100 people had crossed to Thailand on Friday.

"They only have two options—to run into the jungle or cross to hide in Thailand," he said. According to the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, since mid-March more than 30,000 civilians have been forced to leave their homes by fighting between the mili-

directors to more forcefully shift the company's response to climate change. In a presentation earlier this week, Engine No. 1 dismissed CCS and ExxonMobil's other climate-related efforts as ideals that "have mostly generated advertising."

"ExxonMobil paints an unrealistic picture of the likelihood that carbon capture will obviate the need for change," the group said. Chevron also faces a number of climate-related proposals at its annual meeting in May, including a vote directing the company to analyze how its business would cope if an International Energy Agency scenario of "net zero" emissions by 2050 is realized.

Chevron is urging shareholders to reject the proposal in the wake of ongoing company efforts towards the energy transition, arguing the report is "unnecessary." Shares of ExxonMobil fell 2.9 percent to \$57.24, while Chevron dropped 3.6 percent to \$103.07. However, both companies are up by more than 23 percent so far in 2021. —AFP



In this file photo taken on March 20, 2020 a general view of an Exxon station in Hicksville, New York. —AFP

Business

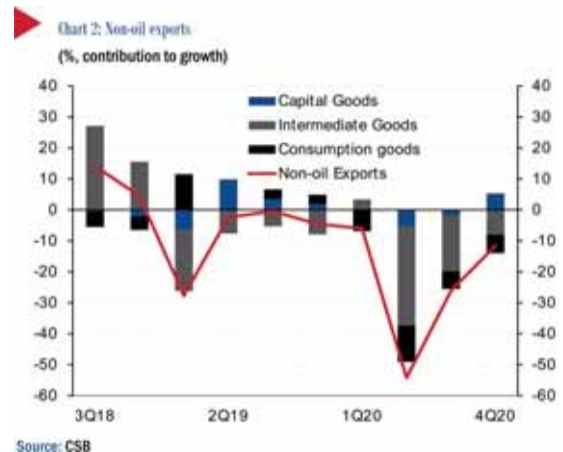
NBK Economic Report

Kuwait's international trade saw further recovery in 4Q20

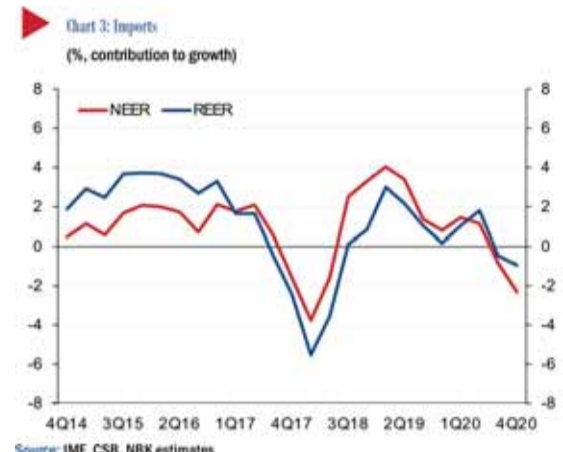
Imports have continued to climb at a steady pace from their 2Q20 lows



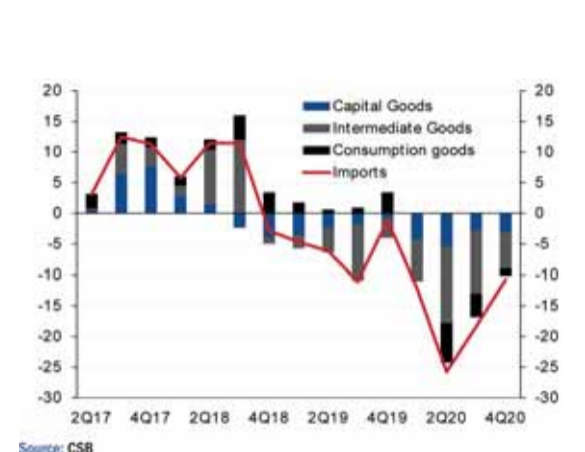
Source: CSB



Source: CSB



Source: IMF, CSB, NBK estimates



Source: CSB

KUWAIT: Kuwait's international trade in goods increased by 5.8 percent q/q in 4Q20, recovering from the Covid-19 shock as the broader economy improves, but still substantially below pre-pandemic levels. The rise was driven mainly by an increase in imports while exports were relatively stable, and as a result the trade balance fell to KD 0.8 billion (around 11 percent of GDP). For 2020 as a whole, total trade fell by 30 percent from 2019 levels with oil exports impacted by the fall in oil prices, while trade disruptions and health containment measures affected domestic demand for foreign goods. The trade surplus eased to 12 percent of GDP, down from 23 percent in 2019.

Oil exports broadly steady in Q4

Total exports (domestic exports plus re-exports) remained relatively stable, up by 0.7 percent q/q driven by a 16.3 percent q/q increase in re-exports. Oil exports (89 percent of all exports) increased by 0.2 percent as oil production (2.3mb/d) and KEC oil prices (\$44.2/bbl.) edged up

slightly. On the other hand, non-oil exports (including re-exports) rose 4.8 percent q/q though were still down significantly year-on-year.

The rise in non-oil exports (non-oil domestic exports plus re-exports) was driven by intermediate and capital goods, which surged 24 percent and 5.8 percent q/q, respectively, while consumer goods (24 percent of non-oil exports) fell by 7.4 percent. The increase in intermediate goods exports could reflect the regional recovery in manufacturing with the ease of health restrictions in 4Q20.

Imports continue to recover

Imports continued to rise at a steady pace from 2Q20 lows. Consumer goods (48 percent of total imports) were the main driver, increasing 16.9 percent q/q due to the notable rise in passenger cars, which doubled to reach KD 0.2 billion, while durable goods also jumped. Intermediate goods imports also rose by 13.3 percent on higher processed industrial supplies. The overall increase

in imports reflects the pent-up demand from several months of health restriction measures, the resumption of economic activities, which started in 3Q20, and the rise in re-exports.

China largest non-oil trading partner

The top five trade destinations accounted for 23 percent of total trade. China, the UAE, the United States, Japan, and Saudi Arabia were the main sources of imports (49 percent of total imports). As for non-oil exports, Saudi Arabia, China, the UAE were the main non-oil export destinations, followed by Iraq and India.

Stability in the real exchange rate

The Kuwaiti dinar remained broadly stable against the US dollar in 4Q20 as it depreciated mildly by 0.6 percent y/y in 4Q20. In addition, the nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) for the dinar against its major trading partners depreciated by 2.3 percent y/y, though remained broadly stable over the course of 2020 as a whole. The perform-

ance of other main currencies against the dinar were mixed during 4Q20: the Chinese yuan, the euro, and the British pound appreciated against the dinar by 6.5 percent, 7.9 percent, and 2.8 percent y/y, while the Indian rupee and the Turkish lira depreciated by 3 percent and 35 percent, respectively. The real effective exchange rate (REER), which takes into account inflation movements between Kuwait and its trading partners, depreciated mildly by 0.9 percent y/y compared with a 0.5 percent depreciation in the previous quarter.

Looking ahead, Kuwait's exports should recover this year on higher KEC oil prices, which are expected to average around \$60/bbl, up from around \$41/bbl in 2020. In addition, imports may witness a steady if gradual recovery in 1H21 due to the recent tightening of health restrictions, moderate rates of non-oil economic growth and a potential continued decline in expatriate numbers. However, international trade activity will also hinge on the pandemic path and vaccination progress not only in Kuwait but also in Kuwait's trading partners.

ABK congratulates 'Experience the Change' winners

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the 8 winners of the first and second salary transfer campaign "Experience the Change", for Al-Raed, Prestige and Elite Salary account holders. The draw took place on the 22nd March 2021 and 22nd April 2021, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The winners were:

Mohsen Abdullah Khaled Alhajri, Abeer

Saleh Aabr Al-Shammari, Talal Salem Abdullah Al Qatan, Reem Khalaf Hamamah Alferas, Aamer Yousef Ali, Jancy Joseph, Mohammed Shafiq Al-Eslam Mohammed Mulla, Jefferson Marcos Lasola.

The 3rd draw will be held on 18th May, 2021. Every month 4 winners can win back their salary (two Kuwaitis and two expatriates). To be eligible to enter the draw, customers need to have one salary credited into their account in the month prior to the draw date. Furthermore, upon opening a salary account with ABK, customers can choose one of the following rewards:

- Up to KD 1,000 cash gift for Kuwaitis
- Up to KD 10,000 interest free loan for Kuwaitis
- Up to KD 5,000 interest free loan for expatriates

representative from Deloitte. Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one of the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Commenting on Al-Jawhara Monthly Draw, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are keen to award our customers all year round, and Al-Jawhara Account is a key part in this regard, in addition to serving as an outstanding means to encourage customers to make savings, in line with our efforts towards financial inclusion." "We seek to enrich our customers' banking experience by integrating our top-notch banking products and services with a variety of draws and prizes that offer them exceptional rewards," Al-Nusif added.

Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK is keen on making

rupees a year earlier. The oil-to-telecoms giant enjoyed a strong recovery during the quarter as India eased coronavirus lockdowns, prompting the transport and retail sectors to bounce back, before a ferocious second wave of infections forced a new round of restrictions this month.

"Our consumer businesses have proved to be a digital and physical lifeline for the nation in these challenging times," Ambani said in a statement. Its telecom arm Jio added over 15 million subscribers during the quarter, with revenues up by 18.9 percent, as pandemic restrictions saw increasing numbers of Indians rely on digital services. The conglomerate said its operating revenues grew 11 percent to 1.54 trillion rupees for the quarter, with its retail revenues climbing 20 percent and its refining revenues up 4.4 percent.

under pressure from shareholder groups to clean up its act after being hit hard by bankruptcies at Archegos, a US hedge fund, and British financial firm Greensill.

"The current and potential risks of Credit Suisse need to be a matter of immediate and close scrutiny," Antonio Horta-Osorio, the former chief of British bank Lloyds, told the Swiss bank's annual shareholders meeting. "I firmly believe that any banker should be at heart a risk manager," he said shortly after receiving 96.45-percent backing to replace long-time chairman Urs Rohner.



triate

The offer is open to new salary clients only, with one salary credited into their account a month prior to the draw date.

the process of Al-Jawhara Account opening quick and easy by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, or simply through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking, as part of our Digital Transformation Strategy that provides our customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes that suit their expectations all year round.

Ambani is locked in a high-stakes battle with Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, as Amazon and Reliance fight for a share of India's massive e-commerce market. The two firms are currently engaged in a row over Ambani's acquisition of domestic retail giant Future Group-which Amazon has sought to delay, with a Singapore-based arbitration panel asking Reliance to halt the deal. Reliance has dismissed the panel's order, saying its agreement with Future Group complies with Indian law. Amazon, which owned a stake in one of Future Group's firms that reportedly included an option to buy into the flagship company, claims that the \$3.4 billion Reliance deal, announced last August, amounted to a breach of contract.

Shares of Reliance were down 1.42 percent in Mumbai on Friday ahead of the earnings announcement. —AFP

Shockwaves rippled through global financial markets and institutions last month when then little-known Archegos sold at least \$20 billion in stocks as it sought to cover obligations to its lenders.

Losses at leading global banks have jumped past \$10 billion, with Credit Suisse accounting for around half of the damage. Credit Suisse had also invested heavily in Greensill, a firm specialized in short-term corporate loans via a complex and opaque business model, and was forced to suspend four funds after the firm declared insolvency last month. —AFP

Eurozone enters recession but better days ahead

BRUSSELS: The eurozone economy fell into a second recession in less than a year in the first quarter, data showed on Friday, as slow vaccinations and pandemic lockdowns stopped a rebound.

The 0.6 percent contraction was in stark contrast to the US, where the economy roared forward in the same period, posting annualized growth of 6.4 percent. China has also turned the corner from the coronavirus pandemic with a 18.3-percent explosion in gross domestic product growth on an annual basis. Europe has been hit hard by a second and third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, with multiple attempts to reopen the economy cut short by new outbreaks.

But more recent data has given Europeans confidence that the recession will be short-lived, with surveys showing that manufacturing is now booming. "While late out of the starting blocks, the eurozone is set for its start to the pandemic rebound," said Bert Colijn, senior economist at ING.

And with the vaccination campaign finally getting into swing, pent-up demand is expected to follow as Europeans begin to spend more in shops, at reopened restaurants and on tourism. The EU's slow-moving recovery plan is also expected to finally get on track, giving a much needed boost to southern countries crushed by the pandemic, such as Italy or Spain.

'Well behind' US

Andrew Kenningham of Capital Economics said the outlook was fast improving with imminent lifting of restrictions in Europe's biggest countries. However, after Friday's data, "the economy was still 5.5 percent below its pre-crisis peak, which leaves Europe trailing well behind the US where GDP is nearly back to that level," he added.

Germany was the major drag on growth in January to March period, with exports unable to overcome a steep drop in demand by discouraged consumers, analysts said. The EU's largest economy shrank 1.7 percent in the first quarter as rising coronavirus infections forced shutdowns to be extended, performing worse than the 1.5 percent contraction predicted by analysts surveyed by Factset. Portugal, which suffered heavily from a third wave of the pandemic, saw a drop of 3.3 percent in its GDP. After imposing a more severe lockdown than most other countries at the end of 2020, France was one of the few countries that bucked the negative trend and posted a 0.4 percent increase.

The eurozone's consumer prices meanwhile rose in April by 1.6 percent, moving closer to the European Central Bank's (ECB) target of two percent. The rise in prices, again largely fuelled by energy costs, came after five months of inflation in negative territory at the end of 2020 and a gradual turnaround earlier this year.

But core inflation, which strips out volatile components such as energy or food, actually dipped in April, meaning demand is not yet fully recharging the economy. Jobs have largely been spared the worst ravages of the crisis that were initially feared when the pandemic froze the global economy in early 2020. Eurostat said eurozone unemployment dipped to 8.1 percent in the March, though this was one percentage point more than a year before. EU-wide, unemployment slipped to 7.3 percent in March. —AFP

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Zainab Salah Fahad Al-Mohammad as the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for April 2021.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara Weekly Draws worth KD 5,000 each including: Sheikha Salman Khalifah Abdullah Al-Sabah, Salma Saoud Awad Al-Selaimany, and Abeer Hamad Khalaf Alejel.

The draw was held at NBK Head Office and broadcasted live on NBK Instagram page in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a

Profits at India's Reliance double on oil, retail recovery

MUMBAI: Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries saw its quarterly profits more than double between January and March, the firm said Friday, boosted by a turnaround in its key oil and retail businesses.

The Mumbai-based behemoth—which is owned by Asia's richest man, Mukesh Ambani—said its consolidated net profit for the period jumped 108 percent to 132.27 billion rupees (\$1.79 billion) from 63.48 billion

Credit Suisse board member quits; chief vows to tackle risks

ZURICH: Credit Suisse's new chairman pledged Friday to tackle risk at the bank as a board member was pushed out following major losses linked to the collapses of two financial firms.

Switzerland's second largest bank has been

Business

Fitch Ratings affirms Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A+'

Agency also affirms bank's viability rating at 'bb+'

KUWAIT: Fitch Ratings has affirmed Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A+' with a Negative Outlook. Fitch has also affirmed the Bank's Viability Rating at 'bb+'.

According to the recently published Fitch Ratings commentary, Fitch stated that: "Gulf Bank has a good franchise in Kuwait, supported by its large network of branches and strong brand. The Bank has a competent management team, which is highly experienced in local and regional banking, with a good record of strategy implementation. The bank's strategy is consistent, based on cautious domestic organic growth

in retail and corporate lending, complemented by digital transformation."

The Negative Outlook on Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating reflects that on the Kuwaiti sovereign rating.

Commenting on Fitch's credit rating announcement, Dalal Al-Dousari, Gulf Bank's Head of Investor Relations, said: "We are very pleased to receive the affirmation of our Bank's Long-term Issuer Default Rating at 'A+' by Fitch Ratings. This is an international acknowledgement of Gulf Bank's franchise, improved capitalization and leverage metric, experienced management, and

enhanced asset quality."

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its creditworthiness and financial strength internationally as it is rated "A" by all four leading credit rating agencies. In addition to Fitch Ratings' recent affirmation, Gulf Bank has a Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of "A+" with a "Stable" Outlook by Capital Intelligence Ratings, an Issuer Credit Rating of "A-" with a "Negative" Outlook by S&P Global Ratings, and a Long-Term Deposits rating of "A3" with a "Stable" Outlook by Moody's Investor Services.

Gulf Bank is one of the leading conventional

banks in Kuwait with total assets of KD 6 billion for the year ending 31 December 2020. The Bank provides a broad offering of consumer banking, wholesale banking, treasury, and financial services through its large network of more than 50 branches and over 200 ATMs across Kuwait.



Dalal Al-Dousari

AUB congratulates winner of Al-Hassad Privilege draw

KUWAIT: In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 28 April, 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes, Over 12 Month Period and has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

The bank announced the KD 25,000 Privilege draw winner as Faleh Fahad Al-Dousari.

For the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to all customer segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account. It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.

KFH launches digital wallets through mobile, smart watches

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) launched the Digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches. The service provides advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

The holders of KFH VISA ATM, credit and prepaid cards as well as Mastercard cards (except ATM) are now able to experience the most safe and smart payment methods by passing the mobile/watch on the POS which is compatible with NFC locally and globally. This service affirms KFH strategic tendency towards digital banking and modern technology to provide the highest levels of satisfaction, trust and security to customers and fulfill their aspirations and ambitions in the field of banking services according to the best global standards. The Group Acting Deputy General Manager Cards, at KFH, Talal Al-Arbeed, said in a press statement that the new service is free.

The modern digital wallet service at KFH is dependent on the usage of smart phones. KFH has decided to expand the horizons of this service to include smart watches, considering the increasing demand on this service by customers. The digital wallet is KFH new modern tool to serve customers in a highly secured and safe manner, where customers are able to use their mobiles and smart watches for payment of purchases as long as adequate technical requirements are available at stores

locally and globally.

Al-Arbeed added that card holders of KFH VISA and Mastercard who have smart phones and watches may enjoy the digital wallet service after completing the identification and registration procedures required. He said that the service shall be made available soon to Mastercard ATM card holders.

Regarding the service advantages, Al-Arbeed said that the new service has several advantages and copes with current requirements of social distancing and avoiding payment devices in highly congested areas e.g. Grand markets, retail stores and famous shops. The service facilitates easy payment methods for all purchase transactions without any physical contact. Also, the service doesn't require the customer to use his credit card. In fact, it would be sufficient to pass the smart phone or watch over the POS device which is compatible with the NFC Technology.

The service is compatible with IOS and Android apps. The customer himself can easily register in this highly secured service. The customer may choose the appropriate card to complete the purchase transaction and may delete or activate the card temporarily at any time. The customer may, within few minutes, follow few simple steps to identify the cards on the smart phones and watches compatible with Garmin, Fitbit and Samsung systems.



Talal Al-Arbeed



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Al-Arbeed reiterated that this new service offers users a unique safe and secured banking experience, thus affirming KFH belief in the significance of technological development, the necessity to work as per the latest innovation mechanisms, the significance of enhancing its competitive advantage, KFH determination to expand its e-banking services and enhancing its contribution to a less cash dependent society.

Also, the new service aims to support the state effort to achieve comprehensive financial services, transformation to a cash free economy and mitigation of cash transactions. These new payment methods shall enable customers to avail our banking services efficiently and effectively and expand the usage of e-payment methods.

KFH announces winner of Jeep Wrangler Sport

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced Rawan Al-Shubaiki as the winner of the Jeep Wrangler Sport, under the campaign "Win with Hesabi" for youth. The car is the first of the 3 cars offered in the campaign that includes cash prizes worth KD 250 for 10 winners per month.

Al-Shubaiki expressed her happiness by winning the car that she received from KFH Auto Showroom in Shuwaikh. This campaign comes as part of KFH continuing efforts to add value to Hesabi customers including advantages, discounts, prizes, and exclusive rewards.

Once the social allowance is transferred to Hesabi program, customers enter the monthly draw on 10 prizes of KD 250 each, in addition to 3 special draws on Jeep Wrangler Sport cars.

KFH offers "Hesabi for Youth" with a variety of privileges as part of its continued endeavor to provide adequate customer care, innovate new products and services and fulfill the needs of all customers of various age categories and interests. Services and products are tailored to suit customers' needs and provide distinguished service as per global standards



regarding quality, accuracy and speed.

"Hesabi" program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active lifestyle. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts

etc. KFH continues to launch marketing campaigns to reward youth customers. Hesabi for Youth represents the ambitions and expectations of youth category and copes with KFH aspirations to attract the largest portion of youth who represents the major part of Kuwaiti society. Also, the account represents KFH initiative to diversify banking services and products.

Ooredoo announces 'Ooredoo Surprise' grand prize winner



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, with the support of Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has announced that they have their grand prize winner of the amazing "Ooredoo Surprise" contest, Hamdan Al-Zafiri from Kuwait who will be awarded with KD 15,000.

The winner of the "Ooredoo Surprises" contest was announced on Q8 Pulse 88.8 FM, in "Diwanyat Al Yaqout & Al Ansari" program, which was broadcast live from the company's headquarters, Ooredoo Tower, in Kuwait City.

"Ooredoo Surprise" contest was launched as a customer-centric initiative in which it offers Ooredoo customers the

chance to win thrilling prizes from KD 300 to KD 15,000. The "Ooredoo Surprise" provides subscribers amazing offers, tailored exclusively to their needs and desires. From the internet to voice calls, international minutes, extra validity, and the ability to purchase Nojoom points with generous discounts.

The "Ooredoo Surprise" service comes with a one-day free trial after which it renews at 150 fils per day, in which participants will start receiving exciting daily content related to different aspects such as: geography, history, entertainment, and more. To play the trivia quiz, subscribers are to login via Ooredoo's official website or MyOoredoo mobile application, or to send

'Yes' to 1111 through SMS to gain more chances of winning. "Ooredoo Surprise" subscribers will win one badge for every single subscription. Eventually, when collecting five badges, the next surprise offer of their choice will be complementary.

During the draw event Sundos Al-Shatti, Senior Manager Digital Services and Marketing - Ooredoo Kuwait said: "Putting the customer at the center of our organization and its decision making is our priority. As a customer-centric organization, we improve the customer experience by constantly enhancing our services, offerings, and awards. We pride ourselves in offering a great experience before, during, and after any customer involvement. We create a value

proposition that is explicitly for customers, based on their wants and needs".

Naser Al-Abdullah, Manager, Advertising and Marketing Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Creating a successful customer experience strategy begins with an aspiration centered on what matters the most to customers. We, at Ooredoo Kuwait, recognize that it is all about the customer experience, thus, we interact and analyze the customers' journey to further understand their changing needs and demands, and empower our employees, frontline employees in particular to deliver an exceptional experience".

"In today's digital world, customers have a wide range of different points of contact to

communicate with the company, so it is essential to provide a "customer first" experience in every interaction, in addition to constantly improving the products, services and packages offered to them. We urge our customers to stay tuned for our upcoming Ramadan offers on all our services, and the 5G internet in particular, that will fascinate them. We are also enhancing our online store with the aim of giving our customers a fully integrated digital experience, through which they can conduct various activities more easily, quickly and safely, especially in light of the circumstances in which we live today due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in our concern for the safety of our valued customers", Al-Abdullah added.



CLINIC PAGE



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Lifestyle | Features



Visitors pose as they enter Disneyland on the day of the park's re-opening, in Anaheim, California.—AFP photos



People enter Disneyland Park as it reopens.



People pose for selfies at Disneyland Park as it reopens.

Disneyland fans hail 'greatest feeling ever' as theme park finally reopens

Fans wearing Mickey Mouse ears lined up as Disneyland in California finally reopened Friday, more than 400 days after the pandemic forced an unprecedented closure for the self-styled "Happiest Place on Earth." "It is the greatest feeling ever!" said Momi Young-Wilkins, a 55-year-old mother as she brought her children to the world-famous park near Los Angeles. "I promised my daughters we would be back here on opening day, and I made it happen." Disneyland Park—the world's second-most visited theme park—and neighboring Disney California Adventure Park have been closed the longest of all the Mouse House's globe-spanning parks, delayed by California's sharp winter Covid spike and tough restrictions.

But with the Golden State now boasting the nation's lowest per capita infection rate, the sprawling resort flung open its gates Friday to the delight of many of its most obsessive devotees. Sisters Carla and Jasmine, 23 and 17, who preferred not to give their last name, used to visit "pretty much every day" before the pandemic. "We would go after school, after work, and just



People pose for selfies at Disneyland Park as it reopens.

go on rides, even if it was for a couple hours," said Carla, as they eagerly waited to re-enter. "We've been excited for this opening day... it's very exciting and emotional!" Inside the park, attendance is capped at 25 percent capacity, and only

California residents who have reservations can enter in groups restricted to three households. As of Friday morning the park was practically sold out for the next seven weeks. The only spots available in May and June require special tickets that also give

visitors access to Disney California Adventure.

Face masks are mandatory, temperatures are checked before admission, and Disneyland's famed parades and "nighttime spectaculars" are on hold for fear of encouraging tightly massed crowds. Staff in Disney costumes—known as "cast members" in the theme park's lingo—can no longer hug visitors, but were on hand Friday to wave from a safe distance and "pop up posing in the background of selfies," according to an official press release.

'Honeymoon'

One resort hotel reopened Thursday with plexiglass barriers at reception and socially distanced check-in lines, with the others to follow from Sunday in a phased reopening. Disneyland president Ken Potrock called the park's reopening Friday a "very, very big deal," with the lengthy closure used to make some "wonderful enhancements" including additions to the Snow White's Enchanted Wish, King Arthur Carousel and Haunted Mansion attractions.

A Marvel superhero-themed Avengers

Campus is due to open at Disney California Adventure in June. Disneyland Park is already sold out for the entire first seven weeks. Some rides remain shut for pandemic safety reasons, including the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage and the resort's monorail, while others such as Jungle Cruise are closed for maintenance and upgrades. For Young-Wilkins, who told AFP she aimed to set a new personal record of riding an attraction themed on the movie "Cars" 50 times in a row, the park has a special significance.

"I came here on my honeymoon, I came here and got pregnant right inside this park," she said. "And my daughter's been coming here for 17 years since she was born—so it's like a family memory." Her teenage daughter had visited Disneyland over 300 times since June 2018, Young-Wilkins added. "We always feel like this is the happiest place for our family to be." — AFP



Lady Gaga

Suspects face attempted murder counts in Lady Gaga bulldog heist

Three men were charged with attempted murder and robbery on Thursday in the theft of singer Lady Gaga's dogs in February, authorities said, a crime that saw her dog walker shot on a street in Hollywood. The suspects are three men ages 18, 19 and 27, and two were also charged with assault, the Los Angeles District Attorney's office said in a statement. "This was a brazen street crime that left a man seriously wounded," District Attorney George Gascon was quoted as saying, underscoring the "very serious" nature of the case.

The three, described by Los Angeles police as "documented gang members," allegedly approached Lady Gaga's dog walker Ryan Fischer while he was out with the singer's French bulldogs near Sunset Boulevard on February 24. Two suspects got out of a vehicle and demanded Fischer hand over the pets at gunpoint. He was shot once in a struggle with the two men who fled with two of the dogs, Koji and Gustav, police said.

A third dog, Miss Asia, ran away during the encounter before returning to the wounded Fischer, and was later recovered by law enforcement at the scene. Police said they don't believe the suspects targeted the dogs because of their famous owner, but because French bulldogs are a coveted breed that can sell for thousands of dollars. Two other suspects, considered accomplices by prosecutors, include a 50-year-old woman who turned the pets over to police two days after the theft. She said she had found them in the street, after Lady Gaga had offered a \$500,000 reward for their safe return. Authorities said the fifth suspect had a relationship with the 50-year-old woman and was the father of one of the three attackers. — AFP

'Game of Thrones' star sues Marilyn Manson for alleged rape, abuse

"Game of Thrones" actor Esme Bianco filed a lawsuit against US goth rocker Marilyn Manson on Friday setting out graphic allegations of rape, sexual abuse and violence. According to the papers filed at a California court, Bianco was twice invited to Los Angeles by Manson—real name Brian Warner—with the promise of paid work, only to be subjected to acts of sexual violence including being cut, whipped and electrocuted without her consent. "Mr. Warner raped Ms. Bianco in or around May 2011," the lawsuit alleges.



In this file photo British actress Esme Bianco arrives for the "Game of Thrones" eighth and final season premiere at Radio City Music Hall in New York city. — AFP

"Mr. Warner committed sexual acts with Ms. Bianco when she was unconscious or otherwise unable to consent" and "also committed sexual battery against Ms. Bianco on multiple occasions," it says.

In a statement to AFP, Manson's lawyer

Howard King described the claims as "provably false" and accused Bianco and her attorney of making "outrageous financial demands based on conduct that simply never occurred." "We will vigorously contest these allegations in court and are confident that we will prevail," King added. Los Angeles police in February confirmed they were investigating domestic violence allegations against the singer between 2009 and 2011. The dates and location of their investigation coincide with Bianco's allegations.

"Westworld" star Evan Rachel Wood has also accused Manson of years of abuse starting when she was a teenager—allegations Manson called "horrible distortions of reality" in an Instagram post. Bianco, who was a fan of Manson as a teenager, appeared in 14 episodes of the smash-hit fantasy series "Game of Thrones" between 2011 and 2013, playing a prostitute called Ros. The British 38-year-old said in a statement Friday she had spoken out to stop Manson "from shattering any more lives and empower other victims to seek their own small measure of justice."

According to Bianco's lawsuit, she first visited Manson in Los Angeles in 2009 for what she understood to be a music video shoot. Over four days, she was allegedly told to wear lingerie, deprived of sleep, given drugs and alcohol without food, and "physically beaten by Mr Warner," including with a whip he told her "was utilized by the Nazis."

Later that year, he visited her in London and they began a consensual relationship, the papers state. In 2011, Bianco moved to Los Angeles and was told she would star in a feature film called "Phantasmagoria" with Manson before spending two and a half months "enduring constant abuse" under the threat of her visa process being damaged, the lawsuit alleges. Manson, who has long cultivated a controversial image with his ghostly make-up and stage name evoking serial killer Charles Manson, has parted ways with Ciulla, as well as record label Loma Vista Recordings and Hollywood agency CAA since the allegations became public. — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 28, 2008 Actor Kirk Douglas and wife Anne attend the Anne and Kirk Douglas 400th Playground Dedication at Lillian Street Elementary School, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Anne Douglas, widow of Hollywood legend Kirk, dies at 102

Anne Douglas, a philanthropist and widow of Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas, died Thursday at her home in Beverly Hills, her family said. She was 102. Kirk Douglas, who died in February 2020 at the age of 103, met his future wife in Paris in 1953, while filming "Act of Love." After a whirlwind courtship, the couple got married in Las Vegas on May 29, 1954. "It wasn't romantic, but it was legal and her new husband vowed that someday he would marry her again in a big celebration," the Douglas family said in their statement.

Kirk Douglas, one of the last superstars of Hollywood's golden age of cinema renowned for performances in "Spartacus" and "Paths of Glory," fulfilled that promise in

2004 for their 50th anniversary. The couple were married for 66 years and had two sons, Peter and Eric. Their family also included two other sons, Michael and Joel, children from Kirk Douglas's first marriage. Anne Douglas was born Hannelore Marx in Hanover, Germany on April 23, 1919. She was a student in Belgium when the Nazis bombed Brussels in 1940. Anne escaped by car with friends, headed toward France. But her German papers were a liability, and she married a Belgian to obtain nationality.

Months after their arrival in Paris, the Germans occupied the city. When the Nazis decreed that movies must be shown with German subtitles, Anne's knowledge of German, English, French and Italian enabled her to find work with a French film distributor. After the war, she continued her career in the industry, working for American network NBC, then for John Huston on the production of "Moulin Rouge," before meeting Kirk. Anne Douglas was active in diplomacy and philanthropy, including visiting 44 countries as a goodwill ambassador for American values, work for which she was honored by the State Department's United States Information Agency. — AFP

Bafta suspends UK actor Clarke over sexual misconduct claims

The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (Bafta) said Friday it treated sexual misconduct claims against actor and producer Noel Clarke with "utmost seriousness" after suspending his membership and a recent prize. Around 20 women made allegations against the "Star Trek" and "Doctor Who" actor in a Guardian article published Thursday, including some who gave their names on the record. The newspaper said the women had worked with Clarke and variously accused him of sexual harassment, groping, bullying, and taking sexually explicit images without consent, between 2004 and 2019.

Bafta immediately moved to suspend his membership of the academy in light of the report, and the prize it awarded him earlier this month for outstanding British contribution to cinema. Bafta faced questions about why he was given the prize despite claims already circulating against him. Clarke in a statement to the PA news agency said he "vehemently" denied "any sexual misconduct or criminal wrongdoing". He added, however, that "recent reports... have made it clear to me that some of my actions have affected people in ways I did not intend or realize".

"To those individuals, I am deeply sorry," he said, adding he would be "seeking professional help to educate myself and change for the better". Bafta said it was not aware of the allegations when it decided in March to give Clarke its award and only later received what it said were anonymous emails detailing second-hand accounts. "We want to reassure you that we have



In this file photo taken on February 12, 2017 British actor Noel Clarke poses upon arrival at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Albert Hall in London. — AFP

treated this matter with the utmost seriousness, care and proper process at every stage," it said in a letter to members. "The allegations against Mr Clarke are extremely serious and the behavior they allege are contrary to Bafta's values and everything it stands for.

"But no matter how abhorrent these allegations are, they cannot be dealt with without due process," it added. "Had the victims gone on record as they have with The Guardian, the award would have been suspended immediately." "Had we been in receipt of this, we would never have presented the award to Noel Clarke." Clarke, who is currently appearing in ITV series "Viewpoint", gave an impassioned speech at the awards ceremony in support of diversity in the entertainment industry. "In a 20-year career, I have put inclusivity and diversity at the forefront of my work and never had a complaint made against me," he said in response to the allegations. "If anyone who has worked with me has ever felt uncomfortable or disrespected, I sincerely apologize.

"I vehemently deny any sexual misconduct or wrongdoing and intend to defend myself against these false allegations." Clarke starred in 2013's "Star Trek Into Darkness" and wrote and featured in the main role in Britain's "Hood" trilogy of films, which shines a light on inner-city life in west London. — AFP



Syrians buy traditional sweets in Damascus' Midan neighborhood during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.-AFP photos



Syrian vendors sell traditional sweets.

In Damascus, crispy pastry sweetens frugal Ramadan



A picture shows traditional sweets known as "Warbat or Shaabiyat", commonly served during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



A Syrian vendor spreads grape molasses on a pancake, traditional sweet known as "Al-Naem" and commonly served during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



A Syrian baker prepares traditional sweet bread known as "Maarook", commonly served during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



Syrian vendors sell traditional sweets during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



A Syrian vendor sells traditional sweet bread known as "Maarook".



Syrians buy traditional sweet bread known as "Maarook".



A picture shows traditional sweets known as "Warbat or Shaabiyat", commonly served.

Year after year Ramadan meals become more frugal in war-torn Syria as the economy worsens, but Damascus dwellers say a traditional wafer-thin crispy pancake called "naaem" is here to stay. During the Muslim fasting month, just before sundown Damascus residents flock to buy the deep-fried sweet from street vendors who make them in bubbling cauldrons all over the sidewalks. The crunchy pastry—also called "Ramadan bread"—is prepared by dropping a thin circle of dough into hot oil until it snaps like a crisp. Fished out, the sweet-smelling pancake is then drizzled with dark brown date or grape molasses.

Government employee Abdallah, 51, said he rushes out to buy a naaem to share with his wife and two daughters at the end of every day. "However tough the circumstances, the naaem is a tradition we can't go without during Ramadan," he said. At around 2,500 Syrian pounds (less than a dollar), the crunchy dessert is still one of the few affordable ones, he said. Other more elaborate sweets, such as sesame-covered barazeq biscuits or syrupy baklava stuffed with pistachios, have become prohibitively expensive. Dizzying price hikes have forced many Syrian households like Abdallah's to cut back on some food items this Ramadan.

This year, red meat, chicken broth, and pistachio-filled sweets are largely off the menu for iftar, the meal at the end of a day's fasting. Instead, most families opt for cheaper items to put on their dinner tables such as naaem. "Children love it, and that's the most important thing," Abdallah said.

'Within everyone's reach'

In one Damascus market, 49-year-old Abu Tareq called out to customers in a belabored voice, near endless airy stacks of crispy naaem. He said they disappear fast in the run-up to iftar. "Sweets are an essential part of the Ramadan spread, and naaem are the cheapest and most delicious," he said. But the wealthy too are customers, he added, because the dessert is a traditional Ramadan sweet. Just a stone's throw away from Abu Tareq's shop, the scent of more freshly baked pastries wafts out of some of the sweets shops for which Damascus is famous.

But each year, fewer and fewer people buy and take home trays of syrupy treats,

baked in ghee and stuffed with nuts or tender date flesh. A kilo of those sweets can cost up to 50,000 Syrian pounds (\$17 at the black-market exchange rate). In a country where the currency has lost 98 percent of its value since the start of the war in 2011 and millions struggle to put food on the table, that is money many simply do not have. Instead, crispy "Ramadan bread" is still a delight they can afford. "The naaem is within everyone's reach," said Abu Tareq. "Ramadan wouldn't taste the same without it." — AFP



A Syrian vendor sells traditional sweets known as "Qatayef", commonly served during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Grammys scrap 'secret' nomination committees after criticism

The organizers of the Grammys said Friday they were scrapping the "secret" committees that select which acts get nominated for the prestigious music awards following criticism from artists and allegations of rigging. The Recording

Academy said nominations for the 2022 awards would be decided by its entire voting membership of more than 11,000, rather than the anonymous 15-30 member expert committees who had previously made the selections. The Academy said the "significant changes" to the awards process "reflect its ongoing commitment to evolve with the musical landscape and to ensure that the Grammy Awards rules and guidelines are transparent and equitable."

In its statement, the organization said it was also reducing the number of categories in which voters can vote and added two new award categories, in Latin and global music, to bring the total to 86. The changes come after R&B star The Weeknd in November accused the Grammy organizers of being corrupt after he surprisingly

received no nominations, despite a big year commercially. "The Grammys remain corrupt. You owe me, my fans and the industry transparency..." the Canadian, known for hits like "Blinding Lights" and "Starboy," tweeted at the time and pledged to stop submitting music for awards consideration. Harvey Mason Jr, chairman and interim president of the Academy, said it had "been a year of unprecedented, transformational change for the Recording Academy."

"This is a new Academy, one that is driven to action and that has doubled down on the commitment to meeting the needs of the music community." Last year the Academy's first female CEO, Deborah Dugan was fired over alleged bullying. In a legal complaint, Dugan said she was ousted after raising concerns ranging from vot-

ing irregularities to sexual harassment and alleged rape. Former One Direction singer Zayn Malik criticized the anonymous nomination committees in March. "I'm keeping the pressure on & fighting for transparency & inclusion. We need to make sure we are honoring and celebrating 'creative excellence' of ALL. End the secret committees," tweeted the singer, who has never been nominated either with his former group or as a solo artist. "My tweet was not personal or about eligibility but was about the need for inclusion and the lack of transparency of the nomination process and the space that creates and allows favoritism, racism, and networking politics to influence the voting process," Malik added.-AFP



Sports

Photo of the Day



Jaan Roose performs in Seli Raba, Estonia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

MLB fires Alomar after 2014 sexual misconduct incident

NEW YORK: Hall of Fame second baseman Roberto Alomar was fired Friday as a consultant to Major League Baseball and placed upon the permanently ineligible list over a 2014 sexual misconduct incident. MLB commissioner Rob Manfred issued the punishment, which also led to the Toronto Blue Jays severing ties to the 53-year-old Puerto Rican, who played in MLB from 1988 through 2004 and helped the Blue Jays to World Series titles in 1992 and 1993.

"At my office's request, an independent investigation was conducted by an external legal firm to review an allegation of sexual misconduct reported by a baseball industry employee earlier this year involving Mr Alomar in 2014," Manfred said. "Having reviewed all of the available evidence from the now completed investigation, I have concluded that Mr. Alomar violated MLB's policies, and that termination of his consultant contract and placement on MLB's Ineligible List are warranted."

"We are grateful for the courage of the individual who came forward. MLB will continue to strive to create environments in which people feel comfortable speaking up without fear of reprimand, retaliation, or exclusion," Manfred said no further details of the incident would be released to protect the identity of the individual involved, while Alomar released a statement on Twitter saying he wanted a forum to challenge the accusation against him.

"I am disappointed, surprised and upset with today's news," Alomar said. "With the current social



TORONTO: In this file photo taken on Oct 4, 2016, former Major League Baseball player Roberto Alomar throws out the ceremonial first pitch prior to the American League Wild Card game between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Baltimore Orioles at Rogers Centre. — AFP

climate, I understand why Major League Baseball has taken the position they have. My hope is that this allegation can be heard in a venue that will allow me to address the accusation directly." Alomar would need to apply to MLB for reinstatement from the banned list.

Alomar, whose father Sandy Alomar Sr. was an

MLB second baseman in the 1960s and 1970s, served several roles for the Blue Jays, whose president, Mark Shapiro, supported the decision by Manfred in cutting all ties with him. "The Toronto Blue Jays believe in creating a safe, inclusive, and empathetic environment, where everyone involved in our game is respected," Shapiro said. "I am reaffirming our organization's commitment to our employees, fans, media, and partners to uphold a culture of respect that treats all individuals with dignity."

The Blue Jays, in a statement, said they were removing honors to Alomar in the team's home ballpark, where his jersey number, 12, had been retired. "The Blue Jays are severing all ties with Alomar, effective immediately," the team statement said. "The Blue Jays are committed to advancing respect and equity in baseball and are taking further action by removing Alomar from the Level of Excellence and taking down his banner at Rogers Centre."

Alomar was named to 12 consecutive MLB All-Star Games from 1990 to 2001 and finished his 17-year career with a .300 batting average, 2,724 hits, 270 home runs with 1,134 runs batted in and 474 stolen bases. Alomar played for the Blue Jays, San Diego Padres, Baltimore Orioles, Cleveland Indians, Chicago White Sox, Arizona Diamondbacks and New York Mets before retiring in 2005. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2011 with 90 percent support from a media selection panel. — AFP

"I decided to play aggressively in the back-nine," Lin said. "I knew there were still lots of opportunities and I just had to stay patient. The last couple of holes were pretty surreal! It's going to be a brand-new experience for me. Today's round has given me lots of confidence and I'm just going to do exactly the same thing like I did today."

South Korea's Park, who shared the overnight lead with fellow South Korean Park Hee-young, started promisingly with four birdies in a blemish-free front-nine. Her fortunes turned quickly in the back-nine as she dropped four shots with bogeys and a double-bogey on holes 11, 14 and 16. But the Olympic gold medalist redeemed herself with a birdie on 18 to keep herself in contention at the Singapore tournament.

Meanwhile, Keegan Bradley holed out for eagle from the fairway at his final hole on Friday to share the 36-hole lead at the Valspar Championship with fellow American Sam Burns. Overnight leader Bradley's five-under 66 saw him keep pace with Burns, who fired five of his eight birdies on the back nine in a blemish-free eight-under par 63. The US duo were four strokes clear of their nearest rivals with a record 36-hole total of 12-under 130. South Korean KJ Choi had set the previous best 36-hole score at Innisbrook in Palm Harbor, Florida, with a 131 back in 2002. "It was a fun day and what a way to finish. It was a blast," Bradley said after his gap wedge from 119 yards out at the par-four ninth tracked the pin all the way, landing just beyond the hole and spinning back in. — AFP



PALM HARBOR, Florida: A general view during the second round of the Valspar Championship on the Copperhead Course at Innisbrook Resort on Friday. — AFP

Lin bids to make history; Bradley, Burns share lead

SINGAPORE/MIAMI: Lin Xiyu could become the first Chinese female golfer to win the HSBC Women's World Championship after she fired a five-under-par 67 to snatch the third round lead yesterday. Lin, who is holding a 54-hole lead for the first time, had a sparkling back-nine to thank as she stormed up the leaderboard with four birdies in her last six holes to take a one-shot lead over Australia's Hannah Green and South Korea's Park In-bee.

Green and Park returned with matching three-day totals of 13-under-par 203 to share second place. The day did not start off according to plan for Lin as she stumbled early with a bogey-five on the first hole. She recovered quickly with birdies on the second and fifth holes but was pegged back again with another bogey on seven.

"I was really feeling nervous at the first hole. I thought I was going to hit it longer and left the putt short. But I just told myself that like yesterday when I had two bogeys, I can bounce back," said Lin. The 25-year-old birdied the ninth hole and started her charge with another birdie on 13 before finishing off strongly with further birdies on 15, 16 and 18 to sign for a 202 total.



MUNICH: Germany's Alexander Zverev returns the ball to Belarus' Ilya Ivashka during their quarterfinal match at the ATP Tennis BMW Open on Friday. — AFP

Top seed Zverev crashes out; Osaka enjoys winning start

MUNICH/MADRID: Top seed Alexander Zverev crashed out of Munich's ATP clay court tournament after a shock defeat to qualifier Ilya Ivashka in the quarterfinals on Friday. Despite winning the opening set on a tie-breaker, Zverev, the 2017 and 2018 Munich champion, bowed out 7-6 (7/5), 5-7, 3-6 after Ivashka of Belarus converted his first match point.

The 27-year-old is ranked 101 places below world number six Zverev, 24, who made numerous errors. "This is a match I should never have lost - I'm sad and disappointed", admitted Germany's Zverev. Half of his 14 double faults came in the deciding set as Zverev lost after two hours, 33 minutes while Ivashka reached a semi-final on tour for the first time in his career.

Meanwhile, Japan's Naomi Osaka began her bid to capture a first clay court title with a 7-5, 6-2 win over compatriot Misaki Doi in the opening round of the Madrid Open on Friday. The 23-year-old world number two recovered from an early break to ease into the last 32 in 87 minutes on the back of six aces, the last of which came on match point, and five breaks of serve. For left-handed Doi, the world 79, it was a 21st loss in 21 meetings against top 10 players. Osaka, the reigning US and Australian Open champion, has seven career hard court titles to her name, but has never managed to lift a clay court trophy. — AFP

Maradona was left to 'fate' ahead of death: Expert panel

BUENOS AIRES: Argentine football icon Diego Maradona received inadequate medical care and was left to his fate for a "prolonged, agonizing period" before he died last year, an expert medical panel concluded Friday. In a 70-page document, the panel stated that Maradona, who succumbed to a heart attack on Nov 25 at the age of 60, "started to die at least 12 hours before" the moment he was found dead in his bed.

Maradona died just weeks after undergoing brain surgery on a blood clot. A panel of 20 experts was convened by Argentina's public prosecutor to examine the cause of death and to determine if there had been any negligence. Maradona's neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and psychologist Carlos Diaz are under investigation as well as two nurses, a nursing coordinator and a medical coordinator.

The finding could result in a case of wrongful death, and a prison sentence of up to 15 years if convicted. The legal proceedings were prompted by a complaint filed by two of Maradona's five daughters against Luque, whom they blamed for their father's deteriorating condition after the brain operation. Maradona underwent surgery on Nov 3, just four days after he celebrated his 60th birthday at the club he coached, Gimnasia y Esgrima. However, he appeared in poor health then, and had trouble speaking.

'Deficiencies and irregularities'

Maradona had battled cocaine and alcohol addictions during his life. He was suffering from liver, kidney and cardiovascular disorders when he died. Two of the football great's daughters have accused Luque of responsibility in Maradona's deteriorating health. The panel concluded that Maradona "would have had a better chance of survival" with adequate treatment in an appropriate medical facility.

He died in his bed in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighborhood, where he was receiving home care. Maradona did not have "full use of his mental faculties" and should not have been left to decide where he would be treated, the experts said. They also found that his treatment was rife with "deficiencies and irregularities" and the medical team had left his survival "to fate".

Sebastian Sanchi, a former spokesman for Maradona, told AFP, "it is clear that the panel says that things were not done right". Maradona is an idol to millions of Argentines after he inspired the South American country to only its second World Cup triumph in 1986. An attacking midfielder who spent two years with Spanish giants Barcelona, he is also loved in Naples where he helped Napoli win the only two Serie A titles in the club's history. — AFP



Trayvon Bromell

Bromell comeback gathers pace with world best 9.88sec

MIAMI: Trayvon Bromell of the United States set a world-leading 9.88sec with 100m victory at an invitational meet in Florida on Friday, continuing his impressive start to the season after years dogged by injuries. Bromell, racing at the University of North Florida Invitational near his training base at Jacksonville, powered home ahead of Canada's Olympic bronze medalist Andre DeGrasse who was second in 10.05sec. Divine Odudu was third while France's Jimmy Vicaut finished fourth with a time of 10.17.

Bromell's blistering run came after a 100m victory at the Oregon Relays in Eugene last weekend, where he defeated world 200m champion Noah Lyles in 10.01sec. The 25-year-old Bromell's form suggests he is now firmly in the frame as a potential 100m gold medalist at this year's Tokyo Olympics, where world champion Christian Coleman will be absent because of a doping ban.

Bromell's return to form comes after a career that had been blown off course by a catalogue of injuries. He exploded onto the athletics scene in 2015, when he ran a personal best time of 9.84sec for the 100m before his 20th birthday - the fastest time ever run by a teenager over the distance - before later claiming a bronze at that year's World Championships in Beijing.

He won gold in the 60m at the World Indoor Championships in Portland in 2016, but suffered disappointment at the Rio Olympics that year, only finishing in eighth place in the final won by Usain Bolt. He later suffered a torn Achilles in the final of the 4x100m relay, the start of an injury nightmare that saw him miss two full years of competition. — AFP

Sports

Tatum explodes for 60, Celtics roar back from 32-point deficit

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum scored a career-high 60 points as the Boston Celtics stormed back from a 32-point first half deficit for a 143-140 overtime win over the San Antonio Spurs at the Boston Garden. Tatum's point total equalled Boston icon Larry Bird for the most points scored in a game in Celtic history and he is the second youngest player ever in the NBA behind Devin Booker to post a 60-point game.

"It's a surreal feeling," Tatum said of owning the franchise record with Bird. "Maybe tomorrow I will realize how special it is." The 23-year-old Tatum made four free throws in the final 12 seconds of overtime for the Celtics who roared back from a 29-point halftime deficit to level the score halfway through the fourth quarter on Friday night. Tatum's previous career best was 53 points against the Minnesota Timberwolves on April 9.

Tatum hit a three pointer with 38 seconds left in the fourth to give the Celtics their first lead 127-126 since early in the first quarter. Tatum drained another free throw with 18 seconds to play to give the Celtics a two point lead, but San Antonio's DeMar DeRozan tied the game with 10 seconds to go to set the stage for a thrilling overtime.

"That was a tough one," Tatum said. "This game is what being a Celtic is all about. Never quit, never giving up. To be down 30 and come back in overtime and win, there is nothing like it." Jaylen Brown added 17 points for the Celtics and Aaron Nesmith had 16 points. DeRozan scored 30 points and dished out a career-high 14 assists for the Spurs, who dropped to 31-31 on the season.

Lillard leads Trail Blazers over Nets

In New York, Damian Lillard finished with 32 points and nine assists to lead the Portland Trail Blazers to a convincing 128-109 victory over the Brooklyn Nets. Jusuf Nurkic delivered 23 points and 11 rebounds as Portland improved to 3-0 on a six-game road trip after losing five straight. Lillard drained eight three pointers for the Trail Blazers, who improved to 35-28 and are putting together a string of wins as they gear up for the playoffs.

"We have been terrible for awhile, but we are putting it together at the right time of the year," Lillard said. "The way we have won games is more important than just getting the wins. We defended and moved the ball. It is the way we want to play in the postseason." Kyrie Irving scored 28 points for the Nets after sitting out Thursday's 130-113 victory over the Indiana Pacers because of a groin problem.

Brooklyn star Kevin Durant, who missed 23 straight games earlier this season with a left hamstring injury, did not play. Elsewhere, the Philadelphia 76ers used a balance attack to beat the Atlanta Hawks for the second consecutive game as seven players hit double figures in a 126-104 victory. Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons and Tobias Harris each scored 18 points and reserve Dwight Howard finished with 19 points and 11 rebounds as the Sixers improved to 42-21 on the season. The Sixers dominated the Hawks by 44 points on Wednesday and have won each of their past three games by a combined 97 points. Shake Milton scored 13, Furkan Korkmaz had 11 and Matisse Thybulle added 10. The Hawks got leading scorer Trae Young back in the lineup after he missed four



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics handles the ball against the San Antonio Spurs on Friday at the TD Garden. —AFP

games with a sprained left ankle. Young showed no rust, scoring 32 points but the Hawks lost their third straight game. In Phoenix, Booker scored 31 points,

Mikal Bridges added 18 and the Phoenix Suns beat the Utah Jazz 121-100 to move into a tie for the top spot in the Western Conference. —AFP

Kings rally to spoil LeBron James' return to Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles superstar LeBron James scored 16 points in his return from the longest absence of his NBA career on Friday, but the Sacramento Kings rallied to beat the Lakers 110-106 at Staples Center. James, who missed 20 games with a sprained ankle, finished with eight rebounds and seven assists, but he also had five turnovers in 32 minutes of playing time. "I came out unscathed. It's a pretty good start," James said.

The reigning champion Lakers are pleased to have the four time NBA MVP back for the Lakers stretch drive, but James will have to shake off some expected rust in order to get into playoff form. "For my first game in six weeks, I felt OK," James said. "My ankle was a little tight at times. It was just different movements and different things I hadn't done. As the games go on that will continue to improve."

The good news is that his play improved as the game progressed and he didn't appear to show any serious negative effects of the ankle injury which kept him out since March 20. James rejoined a Lakers team that has added Andre Drummond and Ben McLemore during his absence and that welcomed back Anthony Davis, who missed nine weeks with injuries of his own.

"We got to continue to get better," James said. "We are working in two new pieces in Drummond and Ben and also working in myself and AD." At the time of the injury, the Lakers had the No. 2 record in the Western Conference and James was considered one of the front-runners in the league's MVP award.

But James saw the Lakers go 8-13 when he was sidelined, and they have now lost six of their last eight. "It has been a hell of a season. Sometimes we have a game every other day, back-to-backs, and we can have four or five games in a week. It has been a long super quick season." Heading into his return, James was averaging 25.4 points, 7.9 rebounds and 7.9 assists a game.

James wasn't designated as available for Friday's game until less than two hours before tip-off. He gave his right ankle a final test in pre-game warm-ups then announced he was ready to go. Lakers coach Frank Vogel hadn't planned to limit James' playing time although James took his first break halfway through the first quarter with the Kings ahead 12-9. He didn't score his first basket until the final seconds of the first quarter.

Kings fight back

The Lakers led by 10 points at the end of the third quarter, but the Kings outscored Los Angeles 32-18 in the fourth. James scored the Lakers final points of the game on a driving layup with 36 seconds left. He then put up a desperation 32-foot three pointer that bounced off the back of the rim and out with two seconds remaining that would have given the Lakers the lead.

Tyrese Haliburton led the Kings with 23 points and



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball during the game against the Sacramento Kings on Friday at STAPLES Center. —AFP

10 assists and Terence Davis scored 10 fourth-quarter points. The Kings earned their first victory at Staples Center since 2018 and they did it without key players De'Aaron Fox (COVID-19 protocols) and Harrison Barnes (abductor tightness). Davis led the Lakers with 22 points and 11 rebounds, and Drummond had 17 points in the loss. —AFP

Istiqlool first Tajik club into Champions League last 16

DOHA: Tournament debutants Istiqlool on Friday became the first club from Tajikistan to qualify for the Asian Champions League last 16 despite suffering a 2-1 defeat to Uzbekistan's AGMK. The Dushanbe-based Istiqlool finished on 10 points from six matches to top Group A on a better head-to-head-record with Saudi giants Al Hilal, who also advanced as one of the three best second-placed teams after a 2-0 defeat by Shabab Al Ahli of the UAE.

AGMK had nothing to lose and were aggressive from the start, keeping Istiqlool goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov on his toes throughout the match at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh. After several close calls, the Tajiks finally fell to the pressure in the 67th minute with AGMK's Zafar Polovonov heading in from close off an assist from Akramjon Komilov.

Twelve minutes later Istiqlool suffered another setback as AGMK scored their second goal with Jovan Djokic's powerful shot off a pass from Murodjon Toshmatov finding the net. Istiqlool, who had already made history this month by becoming the first club

from Tajikistan to feature in the continental club showpiece, pulled one back with Rustam Soirov scoring from the penalty spot after he was fouled by Komilov.

But even though AGMK withstood the pressure in the dying minutes to pull off only their second win, it emerged that Al Hilal had been beaten by Shabab Al Ahli at Riyadh's Prince Faisal bin Fahd Stadium. Igor Jesus scored both the goals for Shabab in the second half to give the UAE side a second win in three matches. Brazilian forward Jesus first struck with a spot-kick in the 54th minute after Mohamed Kanno brought down the dangerous Jaloliddin Masharipov.

Al Hilal's star players failed to fire throughout the match with Bafetimbi Gomis, Andre Carrillo and Yasir al-Shahrani fluffing chances and when Jesus struck his second of the night in the 90th minute, it appeared the former champions' misery was complete. But Qatar's Al Duhail and Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli could only draw their match 1-1, resulting in both crashing out and Al Hilal making the cut.

Iran's Esteghlal progressed to the round of 16 as Group C winners after Chieck Diabate's 14th-minute penalty gave them a 1-0 win over Iraq's Al Shorta. The Malian striker had missed a great chance earlier in the match but made amends with his spot kick after Croatian Hrvoje Milic drew a foul from Karrar Al-Abbasi. Esteghlal won another penalty a few minutes later when Mehdi Ghaedi was brought down but Diabate's shot was saved by Al Shorta goalkeeper



RIYADH: Saudi's Al-Hilal forward Luciano Vietto is marked by UAE's Shabab Al-Ahli midfielders Abdullah Al-Nagbi and Eid Khamis during the AFC Champions League group A match on Friday at the Prince Faisal bin Fahd stadium. —AFP

Ahmed Basil. Iran's Tractor FC and the UAE's Al Wahda, who were not in action on Friday, also advanced along with Al Hilal despite being second in their respective groups. —AFP

Forsberg fires Leipzig into German Cup final

BERLIN: Emil Forsberg volleyed RB Leipzig into the German Cup final by sealing a 2-1 win at Werder Bremen with a stunning last-gasp goal in extra-time on Friday. Hwang Hee-chan had put Leipzig ahead at the start of extra-time only for Bremen midfielder Leonardo Bittencourt to level with a superb finish before Forsberg came off the bench to hit the winner. "I was only on for about five minutes, but that was enough to get the goal," said Forsberg.

"We are all really happy to be in the final and looking forward to it," he added as Leipzig face either Borussia Dortmund or Holstein Kiel, who knocked out Bayern Munich, in the final on May 13. "We lost to Bayern the last time," he added having played in the team which lost the 2019 German Cup final 3-0 in Berlin, "so the passion and desire to win the cup is huge."

Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann, who will coach Bayern next season, can sign off after two seasons by lifting the German Cup. "The boys fought hard, it's been a turbulent week for the club and we deserved the win," said Nagelsmann after his departure to Bayern was confirmed on Tuesday. "I would love to finish with a title for Leipzig."

His side romped to a 4-1 win in Bremen when the teams met in the league three weeks ago, but the hosts put up a fight this time. Werder goalkeeper Jiri Pavlenka pulled off a superb save to deny Leipzig striker Alexander Sorloth with four minutes gone. Bremen's US striker Joshua Sargent fired wide with the goal at his mercy after getting the better of Leipzig defender Dayot Upamecano on half an hour.

Just before the break, Bremen had a penalty decision reversed after referee Manuel Graefe judged Davie Selke had exaggerated contact from Leipzig defender Nordi Mukiele. It finished goalless at the break, but Leipzig hit the woodwork three times in the second-half. Mukiele hit the post shortly after half time, then Leipzig defender Willi Orban also rattled the woodwork with 65 minutes gone with a powerful header.

Pavlenka palmed a shot by Christopher Nkunku onto the post and in added time, Pavlenka produced a stunning save to deny a Yussuf Poulsen header and take the game to extra time. Leipzig got the breakthrough when Poulsen flicked the ball through to Hwang, who held off his marker and fired home three minutes into extra-time.

The South Korea striker is reportedly being chased by Premier League sides Everton, Brighton and West Ham United. However, a mistake by Upamecano allowed Bittencourt to sprint clear, round Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi and equalize from a tight angle in the 105th minute. Forsberg came on in the second period of extra-time and volleyed home Hwang's header from close range to break Bremen hearts. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Caral Cracy Dsouza holder of Indian passport no. K9616034 has been correcting the spelling of my name to Carol Gracy Dsouza in my passport. (C 0243)

I, Mohamed Oliyil, Oliyil House, Mampuram P.O., VK Padi, Malappuram holder of Indian passport no. K2098646 issued at Kuwait on 29/01/2012 have changed my name as Mohammed K, S/O Ibrahim, Kunnummal House, Karingappara, OM Achappuzha P.O., Mallapuram Dt., PIN: 676320. (C 0241)

I, Jovin Joseph holder of Indian passport no. R2312554 having permanent address at Olimalaputhenpurayil House Karamala P.O., Koothattukulam, Ernakulam, Kerala 686662, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Given name: Jovin and Surname: Joseph Joji. (C 0242) 30-4-2021

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Man City on brink of title glory

Guardiola: Season 'extra special' due to fixture stress

LONDON: Manchester City are within touching distance of the Premier League title after Sergio Aguero and Ferran Torres sealed a 2-0 win at Crystal Palace yesterday. Pep Guardiola's side sit 13 points clear at the top and will be crowned champions if second-placed Manchester United lose against Liverpool today.

After a tepid first half in south London, it was fitting that Aguero - the architect of so many big moments in City's history - should open the scoring with a typically lethal finish. Torres killed off Palace two minutes later as City eased to an 11th successive away victory in the Premier League, equaling the English top-flight record.

Even if United do not slip up against Liverpool at Old Trafford, City have four matches left to secure the one win they need to clinch the title, starting with next Saturday's home game against Chelsea. It is a matter of when not if City add the Premier League to the League Cup they won against Tottenham in April.

City were languishing in 14th place in late November but a blistering run since then has carried them to the brink of a third title in four seasons. The treble chasers could also add the Champions League to that haul. On Tuesday, City will attempt to reach their first ever Champions League final when they defend a 2-1 lead in the semi-final second leg against Paris Saint Germain.

This was City's sixth successive game away from the Etihad Stadium and by the time they return to Manchester to play PSG, they will have clocked up more than 3,500 miles on the road in just three weeks. Guardiola believes that grueling schedule has made City's suc-



LONDON: Crystal Palace's Senegalese midfielder Cheikhou Kouyate (right) vies with Manchester City's English midfielder Raheem Sterling (center) and Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Aguero during an English Premier League match at Selhurst Park yesterday. — AFP

cess this season "extra special" and this win was another tribute to their tenacious attitude.

Guardiola joy

The City boss made eight changes from the midweek win in Paris, with only Ederson, Rodri and Joao Cancelo keep-

ing their places as Aguero, Gabriel Jesus and Raheem Sterling came in. Aguero was making only his sixth league start of an injury-plagued season for City's record goalscorer, who has announced he will leave in the summer. All the changes left City looking disjointed in a scrappy first half.

Torres met Benjamin Mendy's cross with a deflected effort that looped over the bar. Sterling's poor form has been hidden by City's march towards the title and the England winger was guilty of taking one touch too many after bursting into the Palace six-yard box as a good chance went begging.

Ederson had to make a superb save to keep City level when he stretched to block Christian Benteke's close-range effort with his legs. Aguero couldn't hit the target from 10 yards before Jesus was correctly ruled offside after he volleyed home from Fernandinho's cross. It was the first time in 21 games that City had failed to have a shot on target in the first half.

But City are too potent to be subdued for long and they played with far more intensity after the interval. Aguero had been anonymous for long periods, but he rolled back the years to break the deadlock in the 57th minute. Running onto Mendy's pass, Aguero took a touch inside the Palace area before smashing a half-volley into the roof of the net from 10 yards.

Aguero's fourth goal of the season - his 258th for the club - put City back in their groove and Torres doubled the lead 84 seconds later. Aguero, Jesus and Sterling exchanged a flurry of passes, teeing up Torres for a fine low finish from the edge of the area. Guardiola's joyous fist-pumping celebration underlined the magnitude of the moment as City closed in on their latest title triumph.

On Friday, Leicester missed a chance to cement their grip on third place in the Premier League after a 1-1 draw against 10-man Southampton at St Mary's. Southampton had to play 80 minutes without Danish defender Jannik Vestergaard after he was sent off for a foul on Jamie Vardy. But James Ward-Prowse's second half penalty briefly put Ralph Hasenhuttl's side ahead before Jonny Evans headed Leicester's equalizer. — AFP



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